

# MAO'S CULT AS AN ALTERNATIVE MODERNITY IN CHINA

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Master of Arts in Sociology

Li Yu (Lydia)

University of Canterbury

2011

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# Acknowledgments

The author wishes to express sincere appreciation to her supervisor, Professors Malik and Dr. Song, who were abundantly helpful and offered invaluable assistance, support and guidance. In addition, special thanks to Professor Fuchs who was helpful during the early phase of this work. The author wishes to express her love and gratitude to all her graduate friend and her beloved families, for their understanding & endless love, through the duration of her studies.

# Abstract

As a consequence of the pervasiveness of traditional culture, Mao's cult originated from the absolutely anti-religious environment during the early period of modern China. As a response to the modernization in today's China, Mao's cult has become a new tradition and evolved into a modern mode of Chinese popular religion, as well as non-religious patriotism, the legitimacy of the CCP, and Chinese national cohesion. That is to say, the tradition itself was created in the context of modernity, and both tradition and modernity possess only a kind of relative connotation. Therefore, the revival of Mao's cult in today's China, in the religious form or non-religious form, manifests the traditional Chinese culture persisting in the modern development of China, and thereby constructs a unique Chinese model of modern development --- an alternative modernity in other words. Therefore the western model might not be the best choice for non-Western societies. It is impossible for non-western countries to either abandon their traditional culture to develop a whole new modernity, or to develop a homogenous modernity in accordance with western standards. Furthermore, there is no point arguing the superiority of the western model of development, by comparing western modernity with non-western modernity. Alternative modernities will become important phenomena in our developing world.

# Introduction

Stuart R. Schram, an American political scientist and sociologist, considers Mao Zedong as one of the giants of the twentieth century. He makes a comment on Mao's life:

Few major figures of the twentieth century have been subject to such widely varying assessments as Mao Zedong. In the 1940s, he was seen in many quarters (including the Kremlin) as a talented guerrilla leader whose Marxist credentials were of dubious authenticity. In the early 1950s, he was perceived rather as the ruler of a totalitarian party state, subservient to Moscow. Then, during the Cultural Revolution, he was metamorphosed once more in people's minds (especially those of student rebels in the West) into an inspired visionary who had devised a new pattern of socialism, purer, more radical, and more humane than that of the Soviet Union. Finally, in his last years the view began to gain ground that he was, on the contrary, a harsh and arbitrary despot cast in a traditional Chinese mould.....In addition, he was in a very real sense China's Peter the Great: the first ruler who sought to modernize the country by drawing upon ideas and techniques of Western origin as none of his predecessors had done either before or after the fall of the empire (Schram, 1981, p. 188).

It is no exaggeration to say that, in Chinese modern history, Mao himself and his revolution, even the controversial Cultural Revolution, have assumed monumental importance in China. Although several decades have passed since Mao's death, it seems that Mao and his revolution(s) continue to be prominent in research about modern China. In Mao's era, an outright process of deification promoted him to a supreme sacred peak during the Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s. Furthermore, the great upsurge of Mao's cult during the Cultural Revolution almost coloured the whole world of late 1960s red with various slogans, red flags, Mao's portraits and little red books.

Deng Xiaoping's economic reform and Opening Up policy<sup>1</sup> marked the start of a new era in China's modernization history --- the post-Mao era. The strategy of focusing on economic development has had a great influence on China's social economic and political structure, and

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<sup>1</sup> Refers to the program of economic reforms called "Socialist Market Reform with Chinese Characteristics", which began in 1978 by Deng Xiaoping, a reformist party leader in CCP. Because the reform involved the decollectivization of agriculture, the opening up of the country to foreign investment, and permission for entrepreneurs to start up businesses, the reform is called as "Reform and Opening Up".

on the minds of its people. Since 1979, not only have the draconian controls on bureaucracy been loosened, but the previous unchallenged reputation of Mao has slumped. “Going into business” and “making money” have become new fads in mainland China. Dutch journalist Willen van Kemendade wrote in his book *China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Inc.: The Dynamics of a New Empire* that the Chinese people had evolved from being "Mao-worshipping blue ants" to "nihilistic, ultra-individualistic, money-worshipping hedonists"(Kemenade, 1997; Kemenade & Webb, 1998).

On the other hand, this is only one side of the post-Mao era. Mao’s cult still exists in various forms, which is even more remarkable in modern Chinese society. The following are three reports that appeared on one of the most popular Chinese news websites ([www.xinhuanet.com](http://www.xinhuanet.com)) in 2009:

- ♦ According to staff of the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall, on April 4, 2009, at the traditional Chinese Qing Ming Festival, 30,643 visitors, 10,000 more than normal days, visited the Hall in only the morning of that day (G. Zheng, 2009).
- ♦ The 9<sup>th</sup> of September in 2009 was the 33rd anniversary of Mao Zedong’s death. On that day, over 20,000 people visited the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall (X. Sun & Tang, 2009).
- ♦ On the first three days of the holidays of the 2009 National Day, the birth place of Mao Zedong , Saoshan (韶山), received 127,500 domestic tourists, and earned an income of 1,320,000 yuan from tourism . On October 2, 2009 only, there were 60,000 tourists, 28% up on that day in the previous year. We were experiencing the upsurge of “Red-Tourism” (Xie, 2009).

As far as the above reports are concerned, these cannot simply be viewed as anecdotes, or as manifestations of people’s worship of a former political leader. For many Chinese people, these visits to his birth place remind them of Mao’s cult, which was at its high tide during the Cultural Revolution. The worship of Mao did not disappear with the development of the socialist market economy.

It is well-known that Mao’s cult was officially terminated with the end of the Cultural Revolution in the latter part of the 1970s. Since then, the personality cult of Mao gradually faded from the public eye, yet, according to the above reports, it seems that Mao’s cult is making a comeback after two decades. No matter what motivated these visitors to visit the

birth place of Mao or pay their respects to the mortal remain of Mao, these places have become popular and important tourist sites for many people to spend their holidays. Li Jie, a Chinese cultural critic, said:

Although the Mao Zedong phenomenon is a historical fact, it is not merely a historical phenomenon with psychological, linguistic, political, and even economic, military, literary, philosophical, as well as physiological and anthropological dimensions (as cited in, Barmé, 1996, p. 140).

## **The Previous Studies on Mao Zedong and his Cult**

In mainland China before the 1980s, the lack of studies on Mao contrasted with the overwhelming propaganda for deifying Mao. Therefore, for a variety of social and political reasons, the study of Mao's cult was particularly unsatisfactory before the 1980s within mainland China. In contrast, attention to Mao started outside China as early as the 1930s. Some Western correspondents visited China and introduced Mao and his revolution to the Western world with their books. Examples are Edgar Snow's *Red Star over China* and *China's Long Revolution*; Agnes Smedley's *Battle Hymn of China*; and Anna Louise Strong's *China's Millions: Revolution in Central China*. (Smedley, 1944; Snow, 1968, 1974; Strong, 1965). These vivid narratives were clear portraits of Mao and his revolution in its formative stage, and made Mao known to the Western world. However, because these works were only biographical reporting and narrative stories, they were only appropriately regarded as research materials for later studies.

In 1951, a Western scholar, Benjamin Isadore Schwartz, coined a term "Maoism" and elaborated on its meaning in his book *Chinese communism and the rise of Mao* (B. I. Schwartz, 1951). This book was variously marketed from a biographical study of Mao to an academic work on Mao. During the 1960s around the eve of the Cultural Revolution, the Western study on Mao was in full swing (A. Cohen, 1964; Lifton, 1968; MacGregor-Hastie, 1961; Moravia, 1968; Payne, 1961; Schram, 1967; Strong, 1965; Tsou, 1969). These works made a valuable contribution to the study on Mao and were of importance to those who were interested in the development of Mao's China. Most of the publications at this stage were concerned with the evolution of Maoism and Mao's struggle for power. These researchers are



characterized by their challenge and even hostility to and sarcasm against Mao and his revolution. Moreover this tendency was reinforced when the news of the bizarre cult of Mao Zedong reached western academic communities (A. Cohen, 1964; B. I. Schwartz, 1951).

For example, in disagreeing with the high praise given to the Maoist contribution to Marxism by the CCP, Cohen conceived that Maoist theories deviated from Marxist-Leninist's communism and made little original contribution to the theory of Marxism, because of "Mao's personal and chauvinist conceit" (A. Cohen, 1964, p.81). For Schwartz, the term "Maoism" indicated that Mao Zedong's revolutionary strategies were Marxist "heresies" (B. I. Schwartz, 1951). No matter whether viewed as "deviated from Marxist-Leninist's communism" or as "Marxist heresies", it seems that Mao and his revolution and even his attempts to push Chinese development and modernization were regarded as an anomaly in the Western world by these Western writers. That is to say, these Western writers' assumptions were closely associated with the classical theory of "modernity", by which the term "modernity" and "modernization" were regarded as a manifestation of Western cultural pride and arrogance. Furthermore, all of these seemed to imply that the way of modernization and development of non-Western countries would necessarily follow the way of the Americans and the Europeans (Schram, 1988, p.109).

One of the causes of hostility or disgust to Maoism and Mao's way of modernization by those Western writers is Mao's despotism and his acting out his own cult role, even magnifying its moral, religious, and magical aspects to extremes. This cause was obvious from reading Lajpat Rai's article, in which he concluded that: "All cults and the automatic view of things as magic politics have to be thrown out of the window if China has to advance on the road to economic development and social transformation in the modern world" (Rai, 1984).

Therefore, the question of how to understand Mao's cult is crucial to further research into Chinese modernity and modernization. Moreover, this gap is more of a significant issue in Chinese academic literature than in the Western academic literature.

Although after 1981, with Deng Xiaoping's reform and the Opening Up policy, a large number of historical archives were made public by the government, which led to a reappraisal of Mao and his revolution in scholarly works, few scholars have studied Mao's cult in the context of modernity in mainland China. In the 1990s, especially, some previous political

senior officers and staff who had worked at Mao's side published memoirs that revealed previously unknown facts and events about Mao, such as *Recollections of Chairman Mao: My Own Experience in Several Major Historical Events* by Wu Lengxi (吴冷西) (L. Wu, 1995); *My Own Experience During the Great Lap* by Li Rui (李锐) (R. Li, 1999); and *Rethinking* by Wang Li (王力) (Wang, 2001); and *Notes of the CCP : from the Zunyi Meeting to Yan'an Rectification* by He Fang(何方) (F. He, 2005)<sup>2</sup>.

Despite the various foci of above books, their common purpose is to remove the sacred aura surrounding Mao and to demote Mao from a "Shen"<sup>3</sup> (deity) to a person. They are responses to the CCP's official reappraisal of Mao, which rates Mao's life career as composed 70% of merits and 30% of demerits<sup>4</sup>. Written by former officials rather than academics, these works has provided rich facts about the historical developments and practices of Mao's cult, but little effort has been made at interpreting these facts from a sociological perspective.

*How did the sun rise over Yan'an: a history of the rectification movement* was written by Gao Hua(高华) (Gao, 2002) is one important scholarly work on Mao's cult. This book failed to get published in mainland China but was published in Hong Kong. In this book, Gao concentrates on the detailed historical facts of Mao's rise from the Yan'an rectification campaign. However, for Gao, Mao's cult was just a sordid political strategy. The book fails to put Mao's cult within a broader historical, social and cultural context and to interpret it from a sociological perspective. The same can be said of Feng's work. (J. Feng, 2006). As another work on the historical details of Mao's cult, it fails to put the phenomenon in a broad social and cultural context and to provide a sociological interpretation of the phenomenon of Mao's cult.

Among Western scholars, some scholars attempted to interpret Mao's cult as a religious phenomenon. Ninian Smart's *Mao* is one of the earliest books which argued for the analogical features between Mao's cult and a religion. Raymond Whitehead considers Maoism as having "God's saving power" in China (quoted in Janz, 1998, p. 139); Stefan R. Landsberger considers Mao as a Chinese traditional Kitchen God (Landsberger, 1996, 2002).

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<sup>2</sup> For details, see Chapter 3.

<sup>3</sup> Although there are some differences between the connotations of the English words "god" and Chinese word "Shen", this translation of "god" is the closest to the original meaning of "Shen", and it is also the most recognized translation so far.

<sup>4</sup> For details, see Chapter 7.

Scholars who have the same views include Kitagawa (1974), MacInnis (1969), and Woo (1973), who “regard Maoism as a ‘religion’, a ‘quasi-religion’, or a ‘religion surrogate’ ” (Caldarola, 1982, p. 570). Zuo Jiping and Emilio Gentile regarded Mao’s cult as a political religion (Gentile, 2006; Zuo, 1991). All these researches tried to interpret Mao’s cult as derivative of Chinese traditional religion. There is partial truth in this view, but merely seeing it as a remnant of the Chinese traditional religion is not sufficient to explain the fact that Mao’s cult is part and parcel of the CCP’s pursuit of modernization and modernity, and is a phenomenon that co-existed with social and political movements launched by CCP to break with the past and the tradition.

Taking into account the revival of Mao’s cult since the 1990s, there are few studies that analyze the ambiguous religious phenomenon in folk society, except for a few less illuminating studies by scholars whose interests are simply to mention it as a bizarre social phenomenon in modern China (A. P. Cohen, 1993; Macartney, 2006 ). Some Chinese scholars also tried to analyze it. Zhou Qun and Yao Xinrong distinguished two kinds of Mao’s cult, and argued that, in the old cult, Mao was respected as a father of all the people in China, but in today’s Mao’s cult, Mao is treated as a deity or an apotropaic symbol (Zhou & Yao, 2003). However, unfortunately, their research is in large part flawed by an inadequate understanding of the modern background of Mao’s cult, a deficiency that results in the inadequate analysis and interpretation of Mao’s cult as a particular Chinese modern social phenomenon.

## **Understanding Mao and His Cult**

As cultural developments are not homogenous, the diversity of modern development should be accepted. China is one of the oldest civilizations with a long history and splendid traditions, which should not be overlooked when trying to understand modern China. Mao’s cult, as a case typical of those which bewilder the Western world, is remarkable for the fact that it runs through the entire developmental history of the PRC, from Mao’s time to today.

In fact, as a founder of new China, Mao was faced with a series of difficulties and challenges, such as how to break through the United States’ and Soviet Union’s containment, and how to develop economic growth in such a vast and populous agricultural country. In his legendary life, Mao had determined to construct a new modern China, and create a new world for the Chinese. For Mao, the new China should neither continue the old Chinese

pattern, nor follow Western models. Although he consistently defined China's economic aims in term of modernity or modernization, from the 1940s to the 1960s, his way of pursuing modernization was unique. Externally, he continued the spirit of iconoclasm from the May Fourth New Cultural Movement and advocated modern democracy, but internally, through the experiences of his life, he adopted little from the Western model of modernity. The Chinese modernization under Mao followed a different track from the Western version.

However, no matter how Mao acted out his own cult role, magnifying its moral, religious, and magical aspects to extremes, he did so in order to realize radically modern and untraditional values. Maoism was the theoretical basis of Mao's rise to power (B. Schwartz, 1960), and at the same time, the traditional religious culture was the social-psychological basis for the worship of Mao.

All of this resulted in Mao and Mao's China becoming "heresies" compared with Western "capitalist" modern development and the Soviet "socialist" model. Moreover this has created ambiguity and uncertainty in accounting for the persistence of Chinese traditional culture in the process of Mao's pursuit of the new China's modernization. Therefore, one of the aims of this research is to examine how the revival of Mao's cult after the 1990s intensified these ambiguities and uncertainties.

The bewilderment caused by Mao's cult in modern China could be categorized into two aspects: one is how to define the phenomenon of Mao's cult; is it a kind of religion in China? The other aspect is the relationship between this typical traditional social phenomenon and the process of Chinese modernization.

In this thesis, the theory of Alternative Modernity is introduced to illuminate Mao's cult as a modernity which is an alternative to the Western version, and as a product of the Chinese's efforts to pursue modern development. Using the theory of Alternative Modernity to interpret Mao's cult as a remarkable social phenomenon in China, this thesis shows how Chinese traditional cultures persist along with modernity, and how to understand the transformation of these traditional cultures in the modern era.

Therefore, in the first part of this thesis, I will explore what Western modernity and the alternative modernity are; then I will review the early modernization in China (before 1949)

to see how Western modernity influenced China's early efforts towards modernization. In the second part, the early cult of Mao (before the 1980s) is analyzed, and the revivals of Mao's cult in current China are studied. Furthermore, I explain why it is unnecessary, in the Chinese context, to address the question of what "religion" exactly means, and how it is better to regard Mao's cult as just a religious phenomenon. Finally, I argue that understanding Mao's cult will help to further understand the uniqueness of Chinese modernization and the alternative modernity in China.

# Part I

## Chapter 1

### Modernity and Alternative Modernity

Modernity and modernization refer to the social processes and discourses which are subsequent to the Age of Enlightenment in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. To a certain extent, we can say that the Age of Enlightenment, and its core value ---- the emphasis on the rational and rationality - brought about modernity. In the 1950s, some scientists in the field of sociology, economics and political science initiated researches on modernization<sup>5</sup>. Since then, modernity and modernization have become generally accepted technical terms in multiple disciplines.

Historically, modernity and the process of modernization originated in Western Europe, and then expanded to other parts of Europe and America. From the twentieth century, countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, which were colonized by Western powers, have pursued the Western style of modernity. Therefore, the early theories of modernity were deeply imprinted with more or less Occidental/European or Western-centered ideologies.

Eurocentricism in theorizing modernity may even be traced back to Max Weber. Weber's *Author's Introduction* in his English edition of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, explicitly states "only in the west does science exist at a stage of development which we recognize today as valid" (Weber, 1978b, p. 13). Thereafter he logically asserts that only Western societies have developed because of the rationalization in Western cultures. Later, Jürgen Habermas points out that the research on modernization could be conceived as "a theoretical approach that takes up Weber's problem". It refers to "a bundle of processes that are cumulative and mutually reinforcing: to the formulation of capital and mobilization of resources; the development of the forces of production and the increase in the productivity of labor; to the establishment of centralized political power and the formation of national identities; to the proliferation of rights of political participation, of urban forms of life, and of formal schooling; to the secularization of values and norms; and so on" (Habermas, 1987, p. 2).

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<sup>5</sup> Such as, Max Weber (1864-1920) and Emile Durkheim (1858-1917).

Early theories of modernity focused on the process of change in so-called Western countries in the period from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and evaluated the process of progress that so-called developing countries emulated. However, these theories do not describe the historical diversity of various trajectories of developing countries. As Inglehart states, modernization theories are only partly right (Inglehart & Baker, 2000).

From the late 1980s, with the continual process of globalization and the downfall of eastern European communism, paradoxical features in modernity have drawn more and more attention from scholars (Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994; Feenberg, 1995; Fernández-Armesto, 1995; Schluchter, 1996; Taylor, 1995). They criticize theories of modernity that follows the Weberian vein as having been deeply involved in the assumption that the program of modernity, to be precise, the Western / European pattern of modernity, would ultimately prevail throughout the world. Fukuyama announces this as the homogenization of the liberal world-view and the predominance of the market economy (Fukuyama, 1992). All critical evaluations emphasize the fallacy of the early theories of modernity, in which the pervasiveness of Western intellectual and cultural hegemony are so patently obvious. However, albeit that the early theories of modernity have undergone such severe criticisms, these theories have still been the critical indices by which to evaluate the socio-economic and political situation of a country, not only in the west, but also around the world.

The situations above entailed some radical challenges to modernization or modernity, especially after World War II. Various social, political or religious movements occurred, such as anti-Westernism, anti-globalization, nationalism, racism, and even fundamentalism<sup>6</sup>. All these movements indicated that capitalism and democracy with Western characteristics have failed to become universal on a global scale. Meanwhile, the west was confronted by its own inherent problems that challenged the fundamental premises of its own social system (Beck, et al., 1994, p. 1). In fact, the return of nationalism and racism has not only re-emerged in America or Asia, but also in Europe.

Moreover, in this early understanding, the core concept of modernity was so-called

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Podobnik, Bruce, & Reifer, Thomas Ehrlich. (2004). *The Globalization Protest Movement in Comparative Perspective*. *Journal of World-Systems Research*, 10(1), 3-3-9 (Podobnik & Reifer, 2004).

development, which could be replaced with some similar abstract concepts, such as industrialization, urbanization, specialization, bureaucracy, and secularization. With the growing colonial expansion of the imperialist powers, modernity spread into non-Western society, through which these abstract concepts became the sole critical indices to evaluate later development in these non-western societies. More importantly, economic development was expected to bring about pervasive cultural changes. Ultimately all societies would have similar major institutional features, thereafter similar cultures and values, and finally, similar characteristics of modernity. This is the classic theory of modernization which predicts the convergence of industrial societies (Eisenstadt, 1974, p. 232; 2000), or the dominant “*acultural*” theory of modernity (Taylor, 1995), etc..

Regarding the effect of this kind of understanding of development, Charles Taylor comments that “*acultural*” theories will be devastating if we foist them on other cultures (Taylor, 1995). For Taylor, “*acultural*” theories view the change from earlier centuries to today as the demise of a “traditional” society and the rise of the “modern”. Moreover, these theories tend to describe transformations from a culture-neutral perspective, which sees that these transformations will *have to* be experienced by any traditional culture along a singular path toward a single ultimate modernity. Taylor criticizes it as “a falsely uniform pattern on the multiple encounters of non-Western cultures” (ibid).

Furthermore, some non-Western societies, who pursue the Western version of modernity, fail to realize that this would lead to the dissolution of their own cultures. Lured by various temptations of modernity, these societies have transformed themselves in pursuit of seemingly prosperous futures. Yet, there still exist collisions and conflict between modernity and deep-seated cultural tradition. As Anthony Giddens argues, even though capitalist and imperialist colonialism seem to have exported many modern and advanced products to non-Western societies, the relationship between them was still exploitation and being exploited (Giddens, 1982). From this perspective, modernity and western capitalist expansion actually hindered normal development in those societies. Worse still, the western colonial powers constructed the colonial system in a manner that was most favorable to themselves. It is one of the critical facts that further entrenched under-development in other parts of world. With the expansion of modernity, underdevelopment in non-western countries is only aggravated (Giddens, 1982).



Therefore, modernity exists as a compulsion ---similar to the obsession or compulsion in Freudian sense-- which Giddens states is “the issue of addiction” (Giddens, 1994, p. 70). The traditions of native cultures were suppressed by a series of indices of evaluation which came out of abstract concepts of the early theories of modernity. Nevertheless, the repressed traditions, just like the unconsciousness in Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, could not be totally dissolved, whereas, they acted against the oppression in other more violent ways. That is the reason why S. N. Eisenstadt argues that “many of the movements that developed in non-Western societies articulated strong anti-Western or even anti-modern themes, yet all were distinctively modern”(Eisenstadt, 2000).

With all these doubts and challenges against the theories of modernity, two different kinds of responses came to the fore. One response declared that modernity as an epoch was finished, and postmodernity or post industrial society was approaching (Bell, 1973). This is a kind of absolute rejection/dismissal of modernity, no matter what its expression or its character is. Another reaction/response conceived that modernity as an epoch had not finished, but should be interpreted from a different angle. Obviously, the latter position looks relatively less radical, especially from the perspective of underdeveloped countries. Seeing modernity as a completed epoch may be suitable for western developed countries, but not for non-western countries. After all, it is a paradox to say that underdeveloped countries will enter into an epoch of postmodernity without experiencing modernity. The more realistic picture of underdeveloped countries is that they might still be in the process of finding a proper way to continue to develop, rather than being dragged into the so-called postmodernity before they finish their development. If this is true, then non-western societies could not get away from western life styles, and might be restricted by that style. In other words, to repudiate modernity and then to put forward the new concept of postmodernity could not solve the problem of applying the western concept of modernity in the context of non-Western societies. With regard to this point, Jurgen Habermas’ defence of modernity as an unfinished project (Habermas, 1987, p. xix) could be viewed as an explicit declaration of disagreement with the idea of postmodernity.

There are two remarkable arguments, respectively coming from Francis Fukuyama and Samuel P. Huntington, which represent the absolute rejection of modernity. S. N. Eisenstadt summarizes these:

Two major interpretations of these events on the contemporary scene have emerged, one promulgated by Francis Fukuyama (1992) announcing the “end of history”--- the homogenization of the liberal world-view and predominance of the market economy, a perspective very close to the earlier theories of the convergence of industrial societies. The opposite view has been put forth most notably by Samuel P. Huntington (1992). While not denying the growing technological convergence in many parts of the world, this perspective emphasizes that the processes of globalization bring us not to one relatively homogeneous world but rather to a “clash of civilizations” in which the Western civilization is compared often in hostile terms with other civilizations --- especially the Muslim and Confucian ones (Eisenstadt, 1999).

For Eisenstaedt, both options of modernity from Fukuyama and Huntington have given rise to a series of discussions and reappraisals of the early theories of modernity and modernization, because they reveal a reality of inequality between Western civilization and other non-Western civilizations. To some extent, this inequality is embodied in the confrontation of modernity and tradition. Therefore, the confrontation and tension between tradition and modernity becomes the key problem for understanding modernity, especially modernity in the context of non-Western societies. In fact, this attitude to tradition has its deep historical and theoretical origins in the Enlightenment.

### **The Persistence of Tradition in Modernity**

The theory of modernity based on Enlightenment philosophy was viewed as a typical way of thinking with its rigid dichotomy and hegemonic ideology. Under such a framework, the early theories of modernity were characteristic of the dichotomy between tradition and modernity, conceiving them as opposite to each other, with tradition definitely setting back the development of modernity. “Modernity, almost by definition, always stood in opposition to tradition” (Giddens, 1994, p. 56). Even Michel Foucault also mentions that, “Modernity is often characterized in terms of the consciousness of the discontinuity of time: a break with tradition, a feeling of novelty, of vertigo in the face of the passing moment” (Foucault & Rabinow, 1997). The religious scholar Gustavo Benavides also held that, “a condition of modernity presupposes an act of self-conscious distancing from a past or a situation regarded as naive” (Benavides, 1998, p. 187).

The framework of the Enlightenment advocated reason as the only means of establishing an authoritative system of aesthetics, ethics, logic, and government. Especially following Weber's analysis of various rationalities, so-called instrumental rationality was widely accepted and practiced. Albeit that Weber finally criticized the outcome as "an iron cage", the predominant concept of rationality still forced our world into an irresistible fate, which brought about the consequence of an opposition between tradition and modernity.

The rigid distinctions between traditional society and modern society in the early theories of modernity are enumerated as such:

In this view, traditional society was depicted as static, with but little differentiation or specialization, a predominance of mechanical division of labor and a low level of urbanization and literacy. In contrast, modern society was seen as possessing a very high level of differentiation, a high degree of organic division of labor, specialization, urbanization, and literacy and exposure to mass media; modern society was viewed as imbued with a continuous drive toward progress. In the political realm, traditional society was depicted as based on elites ruling by some "mandate of Heaven," while modern society was based on wide participation of the masses, who did not accept traditional legitimation of the rulers and who held these rulers accountable in terms of secular values of justice, freedom, and efficiency. Above all, traditional society was conceived as bound by its inherited cultural horizons, modern society as culturally dynamic and oriented to change and innovation (Eisenstadt, 1974).

Eisenstadt also pointed out that some earlier theories contributed to the dichotomy of modernity and tradition, including Ferdinand Tönnies' distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, H. J. S. Maines' distinction between status and contract, Emile Durkheim's early distinction between societies based on mechanical as against organic solidarity, and even Weber's analytical distinction among the various bases of legitimation (Eisenstadt, 1974). It should be said that there is nothing wrong in these distinctions, and modernity as a new epoch came about because of the existence of such distinctions. The only problem lies in that the extreme over-simplification of these distinctions entailed an outright rejection of tradition.

Theoretically, this dichotomy is generally related to Kant's *What is Enlightenment*, which was written in 1784, and was viewed by Foucault as an outline of the attitude of modernity. In that

essay, Kant argues that: “Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity”. For Foucault, Kant’s “immaturity” refers to one’s submission to someone else’s authority to lead him in areas where he should use his own reason. Drawing inspiration from Kant, Foucault conceives that modernity should be viewed as an attitude rather than a period of history. This attitude, in Foucault’s own words, is “a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task” (Foucault & Rabinow, 1997, pp. 303-319). Therefore, according to the understanding of Kant and Foucault, modernity should be viewed as the spirit of reason and freedom. From then on, the explanations of modernity according to “reason” or “rationality” seem to be the most popular (Taylor, 1995).

Under such a framework, similar to the understanding of authority, tradition is conceived on the basis of its abstract opposition (Gadamer, 1975, p. 282). In other words, the Enlightenment “takes tradition as an object of critique” (Gadamer, 1975, p. 274). According to this principle of enlightenment, in which authority is discredited and the decision of everything depends on the judgment of reason (Gadamer, 1975, p. 274), tradition, as one form of authority and the authority of what has been handed down to us, “is responsible for one’s not using one’s own reason at all”. The acceptance of the tradition implies/means obedience to authority in a blind manner, thereby lacking the power of reason. Thus, the division is based on a mutually exclusive antithesis of modernity vs. tradition, as well as reason vs. authority (Gadamer, 1975, p. 279).

However, Gadamer does not agree with this kind of understanding of tradition and authority under the framework of the Enlightenment. Following the romantic criticism of the Enlightenment, his intention was the rehabilitation of authority and tradition (Gadamer, 1975, p. 278). Gadamer conceives that the essence of authority also rests on acknowledgement and hence on an act of reason itself (Gadamer, 1975, p. 281). Thus he contended that “there is no such unconditional antithesis between tradition and reason”(Gadamer, 1975, p. 282).

Moreover, Gadamer was not satisfied with the rehabilitation of tradition, whose significance goes far beyond the above. For Gadamer, the reason for the rehabilitation of tradition is to set forth the theory of the “prejudice” of cognition, which is the fundamental of hermeneutics, as well as the fundamental of epistemology. If we take into account the theory of prejudice, it

was no longer sufficient only to rehabilitate tradition (Gadamer, 1975, p. 283).

In terms of preservation as the essence of tradition, Gadamer further contends that the persistence of tradition needs to be affirmed, embraced and cultivated. Tradition is thus active in all historical change, rather than persisting inertly as something that once existed. Moreover, “Even where life changes violently, as in ages of revolution, far more of the old is preserved in the supposed transformation of everything than anyone knows, and it combines with the new to create a new value”(Gadamer, 1975, p. 282).

Therefore, we can suppose that any cognition of modernity is based on a “prejudice” against tradition that came from pre-modern society. That is to say, tradition is not changeless, but developable in the new situation. Although the modern age is supposedly a new epoch in human history, we are still hardly able to free ourselves from tradition, as “we are always situated within traditions”(Gadamer, 1975, p. 283). But there are two facets of tradition. On the one hand, tradition is the old authority of what has been handed down to us, whose validity does not require any reasons but conditions us without our questioning it (Gadamer, 1975, p. 282); on the other hand, the persistence of tradition is a freely chosen action with reason’s acknowledgement, and more importantly, tradition will be renewed and then a new tradition will be created.

This is reminiscent of a term from Eric Hobsbawm, “invented tradition”, which means, in terms of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, “old traditions” are quite often recent in origin and sometimes invented (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983, p. 1). Anthony Giddens also agrees that “the idea of tradition, then, is itself a creation of modernity” (Giddens, 1999, p. 39). However, Giddens disagrees with Hobsbawm’s denial of the genuineness of tradition (Giddens, 1994, p. 93).

In this regard, modernity was a relative conception, which has a close relationship with pre-modern tradition. In this same vein of Gadamer, Anthony Giddens points out explicitly that the tradition in modernity is no longer the same “old tradition” as in pre-modern society. While modernity dissolved the old tradition, it constructed some new traditions at the same time especially in the early phases of modernity when “a collaboration between modernity and tradition was crucial”(Giddens, 1994, p. 91).

Emphasizing tradition embedded in modernity, Anthony Giddens calls globalised modern society a post-traditional society (Giddens, 1994). Disagreeing to the idea of postmodernity, Giddens argues that western societies, as well as those non-western societies, were all experiencing a process of detraditionalization, which is the consequence of globalisation. But simultaneously, “even in the most modernized of societies today, traditions do not wholly disappear; indeed, in some respects, and in some contexts, they flourish” (Giddens, 1994, p. 100). Sometimes modernity could create a new tradition, and yet sometimes, tradition might succumb to the force of modernity. Either way, modernity is always interwoven with tradition in unique and interesting ways in different societies.

This helps understand why partial modernization or developments take place in some still traditional societies without overall modern changes (Eisenstadt, 1974), as, for instance, in some Asian or African countries. However, it is the interweaving of tradition with modernity that testifies to the viability of tradition in modernity. As Eisenstadt states, a previously traditional system could develop to be a so-called transitional system, which tended to develop “systemic characteristics and properties of its own, creating its own mechanism of stability and self-perpetuation” (Eisenstadt, 1974).

As mentioned above, on the one hand there is a necessity to distinguish tradition from modernity; but on the other hand, there are interactions and interweavings between modernity and tradition. Tradition should not be the opposite of modernity, and to some extent, tradition provides the frame of reference for the understanding of modernity. Moreover, the persistence of tradition in modernity is not a negative or passive factor; rather it is an active one. As Eisenstadt says, by virtue of traditionality, traditional societies might be better able to nurture some required qualities than modern societies (Eisenstadt, 1974, p. 237). Preserved tradition is interwoven with some characteristics of modernity and then becomes a so-called created tradition. As a result, tradition, as an open system with continuation and variation, has survived across time and space. At the same time, modernity has been subject to alteration and has been presented with various transformations.

### **From Modernity to Modernities**

Traditions can be conceived as very powerful restrictive forces to modernity. As Nilüfer Göle observes, one of the most important characteristics of modernity is its potential capacity for

continual self-correction (Eisenstadt, 2000, p.11). That is to say, modernity has a capacity to absorb change as it deals with various inherent problems within it.

Based on this, two noteworthy concepts emerged and have contributed to some further improvements to the theories of modernity: Eisenstadt's multiple modernities (Eisenstadt, 1999, 2000); and the concept of alternative modernity proposed first by Andrew Feenberg (Feenberg, 1995).

Obviously, both these new concepts possess something in common: the keyword "modernity" has been replaced by "modernities". However, it is not only a question of the singular or plural form of a word. What is more important is that they emphasize cultural pluralism; and that modernity should not be viewed as a singular phenomenon. This is a transformation in thinking.

For Eisenstadt, the concept of multiple modernities is also rooted in the antinomies inherent in the cultural and political program of modernity, which is mainly manifested in various confrontations in the political arena. These confrontations finally resulted in a series of changes in institutional and ideological premises, especially regarding the boundaries of autonomous human agency, collectivities and collective identities. Under these conditions, during the nineteenth century and the first six decades of the twentieth century, various social movements---- liberal, socialist, communist, and later fascist and national-socialist movements---- broke out and heavily weakened the hegemonies of the axial civilizations<sup>7</sup>. Because these movements took place in different societies with different specific traditions, the presentation and manifestation of modernity was diverse. In other words, as mentioned before, modernity was transformed by the persistence of tradition in those non-western societies.

Eisenstadt's concern about modernity focuses on political, ideological and institutional evolution in the modern age. He proposes that the first distinct ideological 'alternative modernity' is the communist Soviet type modernity, which emerged early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Eisenstadt, 2000, p. 11). For Eisenstadt, alternative modernities are marked by the tensions and antinomies of modernity. Moreover, a character worthy of our attention is that, although

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<sup>7</sup> Eisenstadt's "axial civilizations" comes from Karl Jaspers' concept of "the axial age". In my understanding, what Eisenstadt means by "the axial civilizations" is traditional cultures in the pre-modern age.

these movements critiqued and repudiated modernity and capitalism, “they sought in some ways to transpose them into their own particularistic visions” (ibid).

Feenberg is the first scholar who explicitly proposes the theory of alternative modernity, but, different from Eisenstadt, his theory is based on a critique of the philosophy of technology. In Feenberg’s understanding, the progress of technology results in modernization and modernity. To some extent, innovations of technology are identified with modernity, but then evolve into technophobic ideologies<sup>8</sup>. With the growth of modernity and its various crises, technophobic ideologies and their theoretical bases, as well as the philosophy of the Enlightenment<sup>9</sup>, came under vigorous attack. The Frankfurt School is one of the pioneers of these critiques<sup>10</sup>. Although Feenberg agrees with the Frankfurt School’s critical theory of technology, he attempts to overcome the Frankfurt School’s radical skepticism regarding the domination of human beings by technology.

From his main theme, which is “the inextricable intermingling of scientific-technical rationality and culture”, Feenberg argues that technology could still be managed and modified by a diversity of social cultures, against the prevailing technophobic ideologies of the 1960s:

Modernization itself, I argue, is a contingent combination of technical and cultural dimensions subject to radical variation. Aesthetics, ethics, and culture can play a role alongside science and technology in the emergence of alternative modernity (Feenberg, 1995, pp. ix-x).

Feenberg’s reflections on modernity show, again, that there is a kind of false rational universalism of modernity, which contains a hidden biased western centralism. Furthermore, there is a complicated discourse system on modernity, which disguises particularity as universalism, and assumes various unexpected interweaving of universal discourse and particular expressions. No matter how hard some critics challenge this kind of universalism, they all fail. The only reason is that technology, as the most important basic part of our lives,

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<sup>8</sup> This is the term from Andrew Feenberg, who refers to “technophobic ideologies of the sort that emerged in the mass culture and politics of the 1960s” that “underestimate the potential for reconstructing modern technology. This potential is most clearly exemplified by the history of the computer” (Feenberg, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> What I mean by “the philosophy of the Enlightenment” is “the rational and rationality” as the internal core of the Enlightenment were transformed into “instrumental reason”. Refer to Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno’s book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, written in 1947, Hollywood)

<sup>10</sup> Such as Herbert Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), in which expresses his concerns about modern capitalism restricting the possibility of opposition. He believed that the industrialization was creating a one-dimensional way of thought and behavior which decreased opposition towards capitalism.



has already established its predominant position in our societies, and that will take a long time to shift. Feenberg puts forward his own Critical Theory, which advocates that, since our lives have been altered by technology, we should allow technology to penetrate into our lives, and then critique it, by which we might then direct the orientations of the design of technology and make use of it.

Obviously, from the perspective of technology, Feenberg scrutinizes an alternative modernity with an optimistic attitude, and even welcomes the coming of various new alternative modernities. In contrast, Eisenstadt critically expounds new problems arising from the variability of modernities. For example, the new modern constructions of the boundaries of collectivities and collective identities resulted in a series of modern modes of barbarism, and the ideologization of violence, terror, and war.

Of the two theories, multiple modernities or alternative modernity, which is the more appropriate? The emphasis of the adjective “multiple” only describes the situation of coexistence of various modernities. However, there are some more meanings for the adjective “alternative”. Not only does the adjective “alternative” mean the coexistence of various modernities, but also it implies and emphasizes the meaning that there are other kinds of modernities outside of the mainstream of western modernity. Therefore, alternative modernity would be the more appropriate term.

### **Alternative modernity**

Modernity holds a powerful and overwhelming attraction around the world. However, whether from the perspective of ideology or technology, singular modernity entailed some kind of paradox/antinomy that was exacerbated intensively and radically when modernity encountered non-western societies in the process of globalization. For these non-western societies, the values of so-called normative modernity have evolved from the hegemonies of western ideology and cultures, but are disguised as a universalism of general values. It is the challenges to this hegemonic western modern cultural value that generated alternative modernity.

It may be claimed that alternative modernity emerged at the same time as the expansion of the western modernity. Alternative modernity could be understood as a new cultural pattern,

in which the relationship between modernities and the persistence of tradition in specific societies plays a dominant role in their development, whether actively or passively.

Alternative modernity developed passively as a result of the expansion of capitalistic colonialism into non-western societies. In such a situation, the colonial cultures demonstrated absolute predominance, suppressing local native culture. In spite of the continual outbreak of some movements of anti-colonialism or even anti-modernity, these colonized societies still inevitably stepped into the modern age. While the local native culture was undermined, it could still penetrate into the development of modernities in a passive way. At the same time, the tradition of the local native culture was altered and assimilated with the colonial culture, thereby forming one possibility of alternative modernity.

Another possibility of alternative modernity exists only in some sovereign nation-states. Initially, modernities, in specific societies, could take advantage of what they needed from the original pre-modern society, and then develop that into an alternative version, characterized by local needs and cultural traits. Alternative modernity could be pursued initiatively, with self-correction and self-shaping, based on the specific social-cultural background. Modernities developed in alternative ways through the incorporation of imported modern technology and the ideas of civil democracy, as local societies constructed their own collective identities to satisfy their specific needs and their different social strata. That is the reason why Feenberg argues that it is more productive to focus on the reconstruction of technology rather than on its vilification<sup>11</sup> (Feenberg, 1995, p. 6).

Elites and intellectuals in non-western societies are the main forces promoting alternative modernity. They critique and even reject aspects of western modernity, but meanwhile, they also participate actively in the new development of modernities, which merge western modernity with their own original cultural tradition (Eisenstadt, 2000, p. 14). It is no exaggeration to say that they have never even authentically deviated from their own tradition. Just as Eisenstadt says that, “Although initially couched in Western terms, many of these themes found resonance in the political traditions of many of these societies” (ibid).

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<sup>11</sup> Feenberg mentions the ways that the Japanese appropriated Western technology to mesh with their own traditions and cultural and social systems. Feenberg holds that technology can be reconstructed, to serve human and social needs and not just hegemonic societal interests.

In today's age of globalization, alternative modernity inevitably will be one of the important traits of the development of our world. To acknowledge this implies that there is not a general trend toward a homogenous modernity, because cultural developments are not homogenous. We have to recognize the limitation of western culture and its pattern of modernity. Then we can scrutinize various non-western alternative modernities.

As far as the terms of modernization and modernity are concerned, there has been an enormous literature on their meanings and distinctions, making it difficult, if not impossible, to highlight all aspects of the theory of modernity and modernization. To make it manageable, I will see modernization as a process in which a society shifts from tradition to modernity. The term modernization will put more emphasis on the process of transition from tradition to modernity, while the term modernity emphasizes the accomplished features which result from the transformations in the modern age, in which such features make a strong impact on the institutions of the traditional economy, politics, social values, and cultural psychology.

Emphasizing the persistence of traditions in modernity implies a focus on the particular features of alternative modernity, rather than the negation of the transformations and changes of modernities. China, as one of the oldest civilizations with a long history and glorious tradition, has been undergoing fundamental structural transformations and historical changes in the shifting process from a traditional society to a modern society.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Early Modernization in China**

It is reasonable to consider Deng Xiaoping's 'Reform and Opening Up' policy in 1979 as the watershed in China's history of modernization. However, the attempts at Chinese modernization started from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>12</sup>. These early efforts at modernization laid the foundation for Deng's idea of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Furthermore, the phenomenal economic growth and the lack of democracy in today's China cannot be understood merely as the result of Deng's reform and opening up. Instead, it must be seen within the early context of Mao's regime and looked at with respect to social situations of even earlier historical periods.

Under the influence of Western imperialism, modernization has been an on-going project since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in China. As we know, according to Weber's theories, China failed to create indigenous industrial capitalism, because the significant influence of Confucian values<sup>13</sup> in Chinese society was thought to be detrimental to the development of rationality. According to this view, Chinese traditional culture and values, especially Confucianism, lacked the intrinsic force to transform the society from tradition to modernity. Doubts have been raised already about Weber's standpoint which can be considered Eurocentric as he failed to realize the diversity of alternative modernizations. However, it is true that Chinese modernization was a passive result of the challenge from Western modernity, rather than a spontaneous development.

At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, China was ruled by the Manchurian, known as Qing Dynasty, whose government implemented the foreign policy of secluding the country from the outside world. The late Qing arrogantly rejected any attempt to trade with western countries, which sparked off western invasions. At that time, European countries had begun to industrialise and were developing rapidly. Western military power was far superior to that of the Qing government, and the Qing forces collapsed at the first blow. As a result of the first Opium

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<sup>12</sup> In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the last Chinese feudal dynasty, Qing dynasty, began to launch a reform and develop some western modern industry and technology.

<sup>13</sup> Confucian values come from a Chinese ethical and philosophical system called as Confucianism. Confucianism originated from the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius (Kong Zi, 孔子, 551 – 478 BC). It involved a system of moral, social, political, and philosophical thought which is considered as a state religion in feudal Chinese dynasties.

War in 1840, Qing leaders were forced to sign a series of “unequal treaties”, that opened Chinese ports first to European countries, and then to the USA, and even to Japan. Huge indemnities demanded from western imperial powers bankrupted the Qing national treasury, and disrupted economic development.

Along with the western invasions and aggressions, Qing was also plagued by many internal disturbances. A series of rebellions occurred across the country, such as the rebellions of the Taiping (1851-1864), the Nian (1853-1868), and the Boxer (1898-1901).

These all hastened the decline of the Qing Dynasty. Yet, they also motivated some Qing officers to start to carry out a series of projects, called the ‘Self-Strengthening Movement’ of 1861-95, to attempt to reform and reverse the situation. These projects can be considered the earliest official military and industrial modernization efforts initiated by the Chinese government. Unfortunately, the consequences of these modernizing attempts failed to lead to industrialization or capitalism because of the conservative -nature of the Qing government, which tended to prohibit the development of any private industrial enterprise.

Likewise, the failure of political modernization was exemplified by the “Hundred Days Reform” of 1898, launched by Emperor Guangxu, who followed the advice of Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, both of them famous reform-minded scholars at that time. Kang and his allies were strongly influenced by the Japanese and even western patterns of modernity, so the aim of their reform was to set up a constitutional/limited monarchy on the England model. Despite the fact that they did not reject Chinese traditional Confucianism, the reform was influenced by the influx of western ideas among the intelligentsia. Underestimating the vested interests of the conservatives, the 104 days of reform ended with a coup d’état engineered by the reactionary elites, with Empress Dowager Cixi<sup>14</sup> as its leader.

Unable to successfully deal with internal rebellions and western aggressions, the Qing Dynasty inevitably headed for collapse, which also signalled the end of the Chinese feudal<sup>15</sup> empire of over 3,000 years. In 1911, Sun Zhongshan (well-known as Sun Yatsen 孙中山), a

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<sup>14</sup> Empress Dowager Cixi (1835 - 1908) was the *de facto* ruler of the Manchu Qing Dynasty in China from 1861 to her death in 1908, controlled by two nominal emperors.

<sup>15</sup> In a Chinese context, the term “feudal”, which comes from Marxist views on historical periods, is used to describe not only a “feudal period” (Chinese history from the Zhou Dynasty to the Qing Dynasty), but also the generalization of “feudal consciousness”, which is considered as irrational, reactionary and backward and that hinders the progress of mankind.

pioneer of the Chinese democratic revolution, founded the Chinese Republic following the Wuchang Rebellion on the 10th of October 1911, also known as the Xinhai Revolution (辛亥 革命) or the 1911 Revolution. By attempting to implement and realize modern democratic and constitutional ideals, Sun envisioned China as a republic in which all Chinese people could exert their political rights and attain material well-being.

Unfortunately, although the Xinhai Revolution of Sun succeeded in overthrowing the Qing Dynasty, the end of the feudal empire had not brought China peace. Granted, Sun put forward the Three Principles of the People (Sanmin Zhuyi 三民主义), which was the ethnic nation (*Min Zu* 民主), the people's rights (*Min Quan* 民权), and the well-being of the people (*Min Sheng* 民生), as a guideline for his revolutionary programme, and he also transformed his Revolutionary Alliance (Tongmenghui 同盟会) into the National Party (Guomingdang 国民党). Yet Sun's revolution was still a loose confederation lacking discipline, which meant his government was not capable of carrying out the entire revolutionary programme. Moreover, he lacked sufficient organized troops of his own. Furthermore, his most important defect was that his overseas experience and western educational background led him to fail to take Chinese concrete situations (such as the peasant problem, the land problem etc.) into account. Consequently, as the second President of the Chinese Republic after supplanting Sun, Yuan Shikai quickly grabbed the fruits of the victory of the Xinhai Revolution, which threw China into a turbulent and confused fighting between warlords. Sun's revolution seems to have been another unsuccessful project of Chinese modernization.

It is more significant to discern that Qing's government, as well as the early revolutionaries, were forced to carry out modernized projects under the threat of military invasions, rather than to carry them out on their own initiative based on a very immature social environment. As Chinese scholar Liu Xiaofeng says: "...modernity brought about an unparalleled transformation to China. As a result of this non-initiative modernization, the gap of modernity in China was presented with a dual character at that time: clashes between tradition and modernity, as well as between the ideology of western and China" (Liu, 1996, p. 2). Non-initiative modernization seemed to be carried out merely by importing some western modern notions and imitating them, but obviously, this was ill-suited to the Chinese situation of a strong feudal conservative structure and various complex social problems. China did not fit neatly into the Western framework of modernity.

## **Chinese Enlightenment & National Salvation**

As a non-initiative modernization, the early process of Chinese modernity missed an important part of European history - the Enlightenment. Although there were some introductions of western cultural ideas by several scholars, these were far from being the complete ideas of the Enlightenment. Obviously, the normal process of development in China was interrupted by western invasions and domestic rebellions, which led to the national crises of the May Fourth Movement of 1919. It is generally perceived that Chinese Enlightenment started from the May Fourth Movement, almost half a century later than the early Chinese modernization mentioned above.

As far as the content of Chinese Enlightenment is concerned, according to Li Zehou, a Chinese leading scholar of traditional and modern intellectual history and philosophy, the political imminence of national salvation overwhelmed the awakening of enlightenment (Z. Li, 1987). The patriotic passion kindled by the awareness of danger of national subjugation, dictated Chinese people's general preoccupation with political movement/activities rather than with an intellectual/spiritual consciousness. That is to say, the Chinese Enlightenment almost failed if it is analyzed within the classical Western Enlightenment framework.

However, as for the term 'enlightenment', Kant explained that it is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Yet, the process should not merely refer to the spiritual level of "man's emergence from one's self-incurred immaturity". As in Foucault's remark, "Kant defines two essential conditions under which mankind can escape from its immaturity. And these two conditions are at once spiritual and institutional, ethical and political " (Foucault, 2004, p.43). If Foucault's interpretation of Kant's definition of enlightenment is justified, then, Chinese enlightenment should not be understood as a failed one, just because Chinese enlightenment was overwhelmed by the possibility of the event of national salvation.

In fact, Western enlightenment was also not only focused on the spiritual level. Compared with Chinese enlightenment, Western political and institutional enlightenment was guided in highly developed capitalist societies by a well-developed spiritual enlightenment, including ideas of freedom, equality, democracy, individualism and humanism. Yet, the earliest Chinese political and institutional enlightenment depended largely on imported western ideas, and on

the background of a semi-colonized and semi-feudal society without a fully developed capitalism.

It is quite reasonable to propose that there are two types of enlightenment in Chinese modern history (Liu, 1996, p. 388). The early type of enlightenment, which took place during the May Fourth Movement, mainly involved absorbing western modern ideas and innovation in thought. Liu calls this the western enlightenment of freedom and democracy.

However, the Chinese condition of internal disturbance and foreign aggression at that time triggered the Chinese elites to devote themselves to seeking alternative ways for saving the nation and population, rather than merely focusing on the spiritual lever. Instead of importing and imitating the Western modern thought, numerous people with lofty ideals shifted their attentions to political revolutions influenced by the Soviet's October Revolution of 1917. Liu calls this the socialist enlightenment of people's democracy.

Compared with the early type of enlightenment, which emphasized science and democracy, the focus of the late type of enlightenment was on a Marxist and socialist revolution combined with the Soviet type of communist radical ideals and the democratic dictatorship of the proletariat. Political salvation seemed to have been the foremost and only choice for the Chinese. As a result, revolution on the political and institutional level had become an integral part of Chinese Enlightenment, as well as Chinese modernity (Kang, 1996).

Strictly speaking, the aims of the Enlightenment, cultural reform, and the rejection of traditional culture, were all aimed at saving the nation and reforming national politics and society, rather than for the purpose of fighting for the inherent right of the individual --- that is, the freedom, independence and equality of the individual. Attaching great importance to political salvation as collectivistic values clearly exceeded individual values in the Chinese Enlightenment. All the advocating of modern ideas, such as freedom or democracy, was actually designed for political purposes based on the collective interest.

### **Modernization under the Leadership of CCP**

There is no doubt that the critical point of the later Enlightenment was the founding of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which later took on a leading role in Chinese



modernization. After 28 years of war, the CCP won the final victory both in the War of Resistance against Japan (1936-1945) and in the Civil War (1946-1949). Subsequently, the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded in 1949. Although given the poverty of China at that time, the new sovereign national state should have made the economic and social development the highest priority, the CCP, especially its leader Mao Zedong, had heavily emphasized the cardinal importance of political ideology, which focused on building up the authority of the CCP and consolidating its power in China.

That is to say, although China was in urgent need of economic and social recovery from the ruins of invasion and wars, the Chinese modernization under the CCP still focused on political issues. Theoretically, compared with Marx's argument that the economic base determined the superstructure, Mao preferred the determination of the economic base by the superstructure.

Therefore, the major act for strengthening socialist modernization in new China was that the CCP tried to put modern democracy into practice by a series of political reforms. For the purpose of letting the people be the masters of the State, the National People's Congress as an organizational arm for state power was made China's fundamental political system. What's more, as a creative political party system, the new China adopted multi-party cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the CCP. In this system, the CCP asserted that their aim was to serve the people wholeheartedly, and represent the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people<sup>16</sup>.

Accordingly, it is fair to say that the CCP, in a hopeful manner, attempted to construct a modern democratic regime. However, although they possessed the innovative military prowess, as well as those creative democratic policies, the ruling of the PRC and its ideological and political framework, still operated on the basis of a traditional centralized political system.

The alleged political party system of "multi-party cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the CCP", essentially, shifted its weight to the latter part: "the leadership of the CCP". Likewise, the state system of "People's democratic dictatorship"

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<sup>16</sup> see White paper on China's political party system, 2007.

actually ultimately focused on “dictatorship”.

During the wars and through the first three decades of the PRC, the CCP launched numerous political campaigns, the contents of which ranged from “Ism”(zhuyi 主义) to “Line”(luxian 路线), and then to “the Class”(jieji 阶级). From the Yan’an Rectification (Zhengfeng) Movement of the 1940s, to the Anti-Rightist Movement, to the Anti-Revisionism Movement, etc., all these campaigns, manifested recurrent internal political strife under the name of building the leadership and authority of the CCP. Simultaneously, the nominal privilege of collective interest tended more and more to centralize on the interests of the ruling group around Mao.

Modern western democratic systems uphold civil society, which is viewed as a series of relative independent groups separated from the political arena and the state, whereas the early PRC under the rule of the CCP was a radical political and ideological society. The political and social makeup of the early PRC can be understood as a party-centered society. That is to say, in terms of the institutional framework of this type of society, the CCP held all the power, and furthermore, the party’s ideology penetrated into each facet and field of the society. The theories and policies of the CCP were promoted as the sole criteria for testing truth, and even as the sole sacred truth and belief among all Chinese people, taking the place of Confucian ethical ideas. A religious-like system of institutions gradually came into being (Liu, 1996, p. 410). Liu Xiaofeng called it a “state system with religiousness” or “Ism with religiousness”, - the determining modern feature of religious culture in modern China (Liu, 1996, p. 484).

It is not uncommon in China or in the West that a political culture mingles with religiousness. In the modern age, the tendency of secularization reinforces this kind of combination. Religiousness, normally with more or less traditional elements, can be seen in its various transformed forms persisting in modern political culture. Likewise, Chinese traditional, feudal, sacred patriarchal politics, and the cultural phenomenon of religious worship has persisted in the modernizing new China.

In China, different from the West, without the political legitimacy of God, the persistence of traditional sanctification in political culture was proceeding in a quite covert manner. The CCP’s early political culture was deeply embedded in this traditional sanctification in

political culture. Moreover, it was almost completely hidden by movements for the drastic rejection and extermination of traditional culture and the advocacy for atheism in the early PRC.

## Part II

### Chapter 3

#### The Early Mao Cult

Treating Mao as a sacred figure is not a new phenomenon in China. The earliest Mao cult can be traced back to the time of the Yan'an Rectification Campaign/Movement in 1940. After the heroic Long March (1935-1949), Mao had already become a legendary and messianic figure within the CCP. From then on, he possessed charismatic authority as a leader with various titles, such as the revolutionist, Chairman of the Military Commission, and the greatest theorist of Marxism-Leninism.

Around the year 2000, some books about this phase of CCP's history were published by several former senior CCP officials and related scholars. These books disclosed many historical facts and some little known aspects of Mao. Examples are: *Recollections of Chairman Mao: My Own Experience in Several Major Historical Events* by Wu Lengxi<sup>17</sup> (L. Wu, 1995); *My Own Experience During the Great Lap* by Li Rui<sup>18</sup> (R. Li, 1999); and *Rethinking* by Wang Li<sup>19</sup> (Wang, 2001). Another two books failed to publish in mainland China but were published in Hong Kong: *How did the sun rise over Yan'an: a history of the rectification movement* by Gao Hua (Gao, 2002); and *Notes of the CCP : from the Zunyi Meeting to Yan'an Rectification* by He Fang<sup>20</sup> (F. He, 2005).

He Fang, who had a personal experience of the Yan'an Rectification Campaign, disclosed that, since the campaign, Mao had been treated as a supreme leader who was extolled with ecstatic enthusiasm. For example, in Yan'an at that time, "Zedong Youth Cadre College" was

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<sup>17</sup> Wu Lengxi 吴冷西 (1919-2002) was Director of Xinhua News Agency, Chief Editor of The People's Daily, and vice-minister of the Publicity Department of the CCP Central Committee.

<sup>18</sup> Li Rui 李锐 (1917-), was one of members of the Politburo of the CCP Central Committee, vice-minister of the Organization Department of the CCP Central Committee, vice-minister of the Ministry of Water Conservancy and Electric Power, and Mao's political secretary.

<sup>19</sup> Wang Li 王力 (1921-1996) was vice-secretary of Steering Committee for International Activities of the CCP Central Committee, Chief Editor of Hongqi Journal, and vice-minister of International Department of the CCP Central Committee. He also sat in on some conferences of the Secretariat of the CCP Central Committee.

<sup>20</sup> He Fang 何方 (1920--) was an assistant of Zhang Wentian, a secretary of Zhang Wentian (30 June 1900 – 1 July 1976, also known as Lo Fu, and his name in Wade-Giles is Chang Wen-t'ien, who was General Secretary of the CCP from 1935 to 1945, and then minister of the Publicity Department of the CCP Central Committee after 1949), describes a numerous of events which are not included in public documents and offers many important historical data in his narration.

established in 1940; the “Day of Zedong” was set up to assiduously propagate Mao as a supreme leader; the title of Wang Ming’s speech was “Learn from Mao Zedong”; Mao was crowned with titles as “great statesman and strategist for Chinese revolution”, “great teacher”, “steersman”, “great theorist/theoretician” and “great leader”; more and more written propaganda and encomium emerged in public. And all of these were the order of the day at Yan’an. Obviously, it is considered that Mao’s authority had been elevated since then. Just as He Fang says,

The intention of the Yan’an Rectification Campaign, launched by the CCP, was designed for establishing the leadership of Mao and the authority of Mao Zedong Thought. This political movement inevitably created the personality cult, under the influence of Chinese tradition of the highest monarchical power, as well as international environmental at that time (F. He, 2005).

Gao Hua, another Chinese scholar who devoted himself to the historical study of the Yan’an Rectification, pointed out that Mao’s power and influence had been all-powerful since 1942. Moreover, Mao’s emergence as the Party’s supreme leader was accompanied by a growing personality cult. On February 8 of that year, a “Zedong Day” was celebrated in Yan’an, and the audience approximated tens of hundreds. Maoism, and later Mao Zedong Thought, has been widespread since this time.

The previous comrades of Mao could no longer be on equal terms with him. Furthermore, almost all of the leaders of the CCP around Mao became the promoters of Mao’s cult. They vied with one another to flatter Mao<sup>21</sup>. Although their motivations were largely for self-preservation and escape from persecution, their role objectively was one of missionaries promoting their God ---- inseparable from their traditional consciousness of serving under a monarchical authority. As a result, a power struggle developed into a deification of authority.

Mao, himself, by separating from his previous comrades in daily life, had begun to incarnate all the qualities of "dignity" and "majestic authority" associated with a ruler, which looked like ‘a certain force of destiny’ about him (Short, 2004, p. 313). In one of his early poems from 1936, *Snow: to the tune of Chin Yuan Chun* (沁园春·雪), he compared himself to those great Chinese leaders of antiquity, the founder Emperors of the Qin, the Han, the Tang and

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<sup>21</sup> For the detail of this, see Chapter 15, pp 251-2, from (Gao, 2002)

the Song, and the Mongol Genghis Khan, bemoaning his failures, and then viewing himself, with great pretension, as a true hero of the time.

Meanwhile, the rising wave of Mao's cult was not limited within the party. Through ideological propaganda, in the guerrilla zones and base areas, mythologizing stories about Mao had begun to take shape. This widespread publicity promoted him as a deified figure among the masses --- their great savior with a miraculous power --- who would liberate them from the oppression of the "three big mountains" of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism.

The establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 was accompanied with the rise of the Red Sun, Mao Zedong. The official portrait of Mao was hung on many official buildings (the most famous of which was the Tian'anmen rostrum) all over the new China after 1949.

Nevertheless, the tendency of the personality cult of Mao was changed for a short period of time in the early days of the new China. In March 1949, according to Mao's suggestion, the Second Plenary Session of the Seventh Central Committee proposed that no places or enterprises should be named after leaders and that there should be no celebration of their birthdays and no presentation of gifts. In 1956, the CCP's eighth congress condemned the personality cult and argued in favor of collective leadership. Deng Xiaoping, who was the party's general secretary, declared "love for the leader is essentially an expression of love for the interests of the Party, the class, and the people, not the deification of an individual" (Meisner, 1982, p. 162). Thus it can be seen that, at that early time, the CCP, as well as Mao himself, made an outward show of disapproval of the personality cult.

### **Mao's Ambiguous Attitude toward his Personality Cult**

However, there were some evidences of Mao's approval of the cult of himself. One extreme instance is that in 1950 Mao personally added a sentence of "Long live the great Chinese people's leader Mao Zedong" on the slogan for May Day (F. He, 2005).

Under the influence of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union held in

1956, serious concerns about the personality cult eventually resurfaced<sup>22</sup> from the 1958 Chengdu Conference. It was Mao's fear that what had happened to Stalin was likely to occur after his death. This resulted in Mao's shift from an initial objection to a blatant advocacy of the personality cult. If we can say that Mao's cult of around 1940 had the tacit approval of Mao, then Mao's cult after 1956 was encouraged by Mao.

Views on this issue by former senior CCP officials in their books coincide closely. From memory, they all mentioned several central events or conferences, which revealed Mao's ambiguous discourses on the issue of the personality cult. In fact, on many occasions, Mao declared the necessity for a personality cult.

In the memoirs of He Fang and Li Rui, they mention Mao's speech at the Party Congress in Chengdu in 1958. Mao pointed out clearly,

... the question at issue is not whether or not there should be a cult of the individual, but whether or not the individual concerned represents the truth. If he does, then he should be revered ... There are two kinds of personality cult. One is a healthy personality cult, that is, to worship men like Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. Because they hold the truth in their hand. The other is a false personality cult, i.e. not analysed and blindly worshiped? ... (R. Li, 1999 , p. 188)

Mao even said that if someone objected to the personality cult of Mao, it was because he himself wanted to be worshiped. Mao also said it was better to worship Mao himself rather than to worship others (R. Li, 1999, p. 188, p. 212). It appeared his conversion from implicit agreement to explicit advocacy of the personality cult grew from then on.

Mao obviously attempted to hold to his power firmly and prevent the likelihood of its falling into others' hands. Very quickly Mao's speeches encouraged the personality cult of Mao to reemerge again. It was becoming increasingly apparent that the official transition from the sacralization of the nation and the party to the deification of the political leader had occurred. It seems that in literary and art works and in the media of that time, that there was endless extolling and praising of Mao. Numerous posters and songs referred to Mao as "A red sun in the centre of our hearts" and a "Savior of the people".

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<sup>22</sup> For an overview of the impact of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on Mao's cult, see (J. 冯, 2001)

In 1959, famous literates Guo Moruo(郭沫若) and Zhou Yan(周扬) edited a book *Ballad on Red Flag* (Hongqi Geyao 红旗歌谣), in which they collected folk ballads singing the praises of the CCP and Mao all over the country. One of the ballads which was active in Jiangling(江陵) region, was named *Sing Mao Zedong*:

Mao Zedong, Mao Zedong,  
The timely rain for our transplanting rice seedlings;  
The gentle breeze in midsummer;  
The sun will never set down;  
The favourable wind will be for our sailing.  
If you don't want to suffer poverty anymore,  
Please follow Mao Zedong.

Another ballad goes:

Pleasures come to us before we say a word,  
Let me sing a song and show you my true feelings.  
Singing makes the pine and cypress trees green fever,  
Singing makes the star bright forever;  
Chair Mao is my benefactor forever.

Meanwhile, the major national or the CCP's newspapers were beginning to print propaganda and praise for Mao and his great thoughts and achievements, even though China had just gone through the failure of the Great Leap and three years of famine, which were outcomes of Mao's radical and romantic communist utopian ideal.

In 1965, the American journalist Edgar Snow, who had known Mao on the Long March and had become an admirer, visited Mao in Beijing. He was perplexed to find "an immoderate glorification" of Mao: "Giant portraits of him now hung in the streets, busts were in every chamber, his books and photographs were everywhere on display to the exclusion of others" (Snow, 1974, p. 68). Mao seemed to be the only hero in the Chinese revolution.



## A Movement for Creating a “Shen” (God)

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was launched in 1966 by Mao, the Chairman of the PRC at that time, for the purpose of restoring the Chinese Communist Party and the country. This campaign was called a “ten year’s catastrophe” by many Chinese people later on. During this turbulent decade, the whole of China was flung into confusion, many events<sup>23</sup> occurred, and “millions of people were killed, committed suicide, or suffered unspeakable hardships both physically and psychologically”(Chang, 1999, p. vii).

Lin Biao, military leader at that time and one of the biggest supporters of Mao's Cultural Revolution policies, and who was named Mao’s successor in 1969, glorified Chairman Mao to a ridiculous extreme. After the Lushan Conference of 1959, Li Biao, who replaced Peng Dehuai<sup>24</sup> as the leader of Central Military Commission of the PRC, preached that “Mao’s thought is the acme of Marxism-Leninism of the time”, and learning Mao’s works was the shortcut to learning Marxism-Leninism. Through Lin’s promotion, the whole nation set off a great upsurge in “Flexible learning and the practice of Mao’s Thought”. In the foreword to the second edition of Quotations of Chairman Mao, he gave praise to Mao in an artificial and exaggerated way, such as “the Chairman Mao is such a genius who is born once in thousand years. Chairman Mao is the greatest genius in the world”; “Compared with Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, Chairman Mao is a great man with the highest ideological level in the world. There is no man in the world who has a higher level than Chairman Mao... ”.<sup>25</sup> It is also Lin Biao, who put forward that Mao was “great teacher, great leader, great supreme commander, and great helmsman”<sup>26</sup>. The ultimate aim of these glorifications was to establish the absolute and supreme authority of Mao within the Party and the country.

The early three years of Cultural Revolution (1966-1969) represented the apex of the sanctity of Mao. There is no doubt that the Cultural Revolution was an out-and-out movement of

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<sup>23</sup> What Chang points out as events in the Cultural Revolution include : the Red Guards movement; nationwide revolutionary rebellion and great chaos; the fall of Liu Shaoqi, Deng Xiaoping and other party and state leaders; the military intervention; the forming of revolutionary committees to replace local party committees and administrative bodies; the Lin Biao affair; the movement to send millions of youth and intellectuals to the countryside; the campaign to criticize Lin Biao and Confucius; the Tiananmen Square incident; and so on. See (Chang, 1999), p vii.

<sup>24</sup> Peng Dehuai, (October 24, 1898 – November 29, 1974) was a prominent military leader of the Communist Party of China, and China's Defence Minister from 1954 to 1959.

<sup>25</sup> These words originally came from one of Lin Biao’s speeches named “*Directive on Carrying Learning Chairman Mao’s works to a New Stage*”, when he had an interview with the heads of The PLA Military Academy, Political College, the General Political and Propaganda Department, on September 18, 1966

<sup>26</sup> This expression was firstly stated on August 31, 1966, when Lin Biao had an interview with revolutionary teachers and students out of Beijing.

creating a modern “Shen”<sup>27</sup> in China. During those years, various symbolic glorifications of the Chairman Mao emerged in this frenzied political movement. The various symbolisms and liturgical rules were inevitably reminiscent of religious rituals. The charismatic leader Mao not only became a dictator but also a veritable deity among Chinese people at that time.

Alberto Moravia, an Italian writer who visited China during the Cultural Revolution, describes the scene of the Cultural Revolution in the language of religion. For example, he called the plane on which he traveled from Guangzhou to Beijing as “a flying chapel” or a church in the airplane (Moravia, 1968, p. 31); he called the Red Guard a “Children’s Crusade” and “Boy Scout” (Moravia, 1968, p.72); and so on.

The fall of Lin Biao (1971) and his group curbed the excessive and overheated personality cult of Mao, and the educational movement for urban youth to work in the countryside and mountainous areas cooled the overzealous Red Guards Movement. Nevertheless, the social phenomenon of Mao’s cult wasn’t officially restricted until Deng Xiaoping came into power.

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<sup>27</sup> Although there are some differences between the connotations of the English words “god” and Chinese word “Shen”, this translation of “god” is the closest to the original meaning of “Shen”, and it is also the most recognized translation so far.

## Chapter 4

### The Revival of Mao's Cult from the 1990s

Entering the 21st century, along with fast economic development, the process of Chinese modernization appeared in a systematic and well organized manner. The economic development inevitably promoted subsequent changes in the social environment. Among these, the noteworthy phenomenon in China today is the re-enchantment of Mao Zedong.

#### The Non-religious Mao's Cult in China Today

In the early 1990s, you could find a set of cassettes or discs titled *The Red Sun* in the streets and alleys of China, which was published by Shanghai Audio and Video Company. On the package was the text, “hymns of praise to Chairman Mao”, and above it was a portrait of Mao and the picture of Tiananmen with rays radiating from it, symbolizing the sun. All 100 songs in this album glorifying Mao, had swept over China through the 1940s, and were sweeping back again 50 years later. It is alleged by the company that they sold 70,000-80,000 in less than a week. The sales figures went beyond all their expectations, and the demand for this album far exceeded the supply. In the winter of 1991, the whole of Beijing, and many other places in China, echoed to the strains of songs in *The Red Sun* (Ling, 2008). Here is a part of the lyric of one of the famous songs , sung by Li Lingyu,

Beloved Chairman Mao,  
You are the red sun in our hearts,  
You are the red sun in our hearts.  
How many Words so deep in our hearts, we want to say to you,  
How many warm and fragrant songs, we wish to sing for you  
Millions of red hearts turn to Beijing,  
Millions of smiling faces turn to red sun,  
We wish our leader chairman Mao a long long life.  
We wish our leader chairman Mao a long long life.

Since then, the tunes of *The Red Sun* have reverberated throughout the mainland of China.

The 4<sup>th</sup> of April, 2009 was the Chinese traditional tomb-sweeping day. A notable news report

stated that the staff of the Chairman Mao Memorial Hall (Mao's mausoleum), which lies on the southern flank of Tian'anmen Square, said that they had over 30,643 visitors on that morning alone (G. Zheng, 2009). On the 9<sup>th</sup> of September of the same year, it was reported that over 20,000 visitors filed past the body of the dead leader (X. Sun & Tang, 2009). On the first three days of the National Day Holiday in 2009, there were 12,750,000 visitors to see the birth place of Mao at Shaoshan in Hunan province (Xie, 2009).

Meanwhile, in recent years, various new statues of Mao have sprung up like mushrooms in Chinese cities. For example, in 2008, a 20.6 metre-high statue was erected in front of the campus entrance of Chongqing Medical University; a year later, in Mao's hometown, beside the Yongzi River of Hunan province, a 32 metre-high sculpture of young Mao was set up for Mao's 116<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary. In 2010, with proper ceremony, statues of Mao and other revolutionaries were welcomed into the Wuqi County (吴起县), a small town where the Red Army had passed through during the Long March.

A series of commemorative activities of swimming across the Yangzi/Yangtze River and the Yellow River were held in many Chinese cities in recent years in memory of Mao, who possessed a penchant for swimming and swam across the Yangzi River many times. In 1956, Mao swam in the Yangzi River for the first time. Mao's swim became a major yearly event of commemoration, which gives thousands the opportunity to express their boundless devotion to the Chairman. They jumped enthusiastically into the water not only in Wuhan, at the very spot where Mao had entered into the waters, but also in the sea and in various rivers and lakes across the country. On the first anniversary, in 1967, there were 50,000 swimmers in lakes all over Beijing alone.

On the Chinese Internet, there are more and more memorial websites in memory or in praise of Mao Zedong, for example, at tiexue.net, wyzxsx.com, maoflag.net, dfbx365.com, and people.com.cn, etc. On these websites, there are web pages dedicated to Mao, with titles such as "the Chairman Mao memorial hall"<sup>28</sup>, "light of nation", or "the sun never sets?"<sup>29</sup>.

Besides these nongovernment social phenomena, more political actions related to Mao's cult also began to appear in public. One of the best noticeable events was that two parades in

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<sup>28</sup> For details, see <http://mzd.wyzxsx.com/>; <http://www.dfbx365.com/jng/cgmzd.php>

<sup>29</sup> For details, see <http://culture.people.com.cn/GB/22226/70604/index.html>

honour of Mao Zedong emerged in the 2009 national day's ceremonial military review. The first centred on Mao's huge portrait, which commemorated the moment when he announced the establishment of the PRC; the other centered on two slogans: "Long Live Mao Zedong Thought" and "The Chinese people have finally stood up".

### **The Religious Mao's Cult in China Today**

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of December, 2005, the 110<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Mao Zedong, a folk observance emerged in Mao's birth place, Shaoshan, as well as in other cities in China. With the pi-pa of loud firecrackers, many pilgrims knelt piously before the statues of Mao. Among these pilgrims, there were not only some simply dressed peasants, but also large crowds in well-ironed uniforms. They bowed down upon their knees and then kowtowed to Mao's statue accompanied by much lighting of incense (Jianghu, 2008) (See Figure 1 and 2).



FIGURE 1 Mao's Pilgrims at Shaoshan, Hunan Province



FIGURE 2 Mao's Pilgrims at Zhoukou, Henan Province

Other interesting phenomena relating to the worship of Mao have not been uncommon. One



FIGURE 4 The Poll on what is worshiped on the altar at Chinese homes

## Mao's Temples

In 2010, in the Mianyang city of Sichuan province, an 81 year-old retired man built a temple to Mao, named the Hong'en Temple (洪恩寺), on his own private plot (Zhuantie, 2010). Although there were not pilgrims on normal days, it had many worshipers during new and full moons.



FIGURE 5 The Entrance of Mao's Temple





FIGURE 6 Mao's Statue in Mao's Temple

The temple contains three wooden plaques with engraved golden words, which Chinese people call an antithetical couplet (See Figure 3 and 4). The meaning of both lines of the couplet on the scroll is to the effect that (Mao) should conquer the country, rule the country, and that all Chinese people should support and love him. The horizontal scroll bears an inscription which means that the real fate of the Son of Heaven is to believe that the world belongs to all, and that all should wish a long life for Chairman Mao. These words of praise extol Mao as “Zhenming Tianzi”( 真命天子, the real fate Son of Heaven), which is a title peculiar to an ancient emperor in China.

Inside the temple, Mao's gold statue locates the inner centre of the temple. He wears a yellow mantle/cloak, yellow being a special symbolic color of the ancient Chinese royal authority<sup>32</sup>. Besides Mao's statue, the temple is also dedicated to Zhou En'lai and Zhu De. Before these three statues, there are some lighting incense sticks on the table and several kowtow cushions on the ground.

A journalist for Times Online, Jane Macartney, reported another temple to Mao in a small village in Shaanxi province. Although visitors are not allowed by the caretaker to burn incense before the statue, “many who come are disappointed at the restrictions”. Instead of this, visitors offer “gaudy plastic flowers and packets of the cigarettes that Mao chain-smoked”, and “one cigarette is tucked between his pink-painted plaster fingers”(Macartney, 2006 ).

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<sup>32</sup> Yellow was the symbolic color of emperor in ancient China. So yellow was often only allowed to be used to decorate royal palaces, altars, temples, and robes or attire of the emperors.



It is reported that there is another Mao temple located 60 kilometers away from a small town in Pingyang County - in Wenzhou city of the Zhejiang province (Zang, 2007)<sup>33</sup>. However, there is a saying that it is not a temple, but just Mao's ancestor hall. Whether it is a temple or not, the fact remains that Mao is worshiped by Chinese civilians in the manner of a religious cult.

## **The Story of Mao's Apparition**

There is an outlandish story regarding Mao's apparition in Xincui County of Hunan Province in Cao Jinqing's book, *China Beside the Yellow River*, which records various events during his field work in several provinces in North China. Cao had a personal visit to the place/house of Mao's apparition, and he described it as a witness:

Entering into the hall, a standard image of Mao was detected on the wall, which is the widely known Mao's apparition ... It can be seen that it is obviously not intentionally painted on in an artificial way ... (Cao, 2001, p 596)

According to Cao's introduction, in 1988, the householder, Tian Shufa, found that an over-10 year-old portrait of Mao on his wall had some little tear or damage, so he took the portrait off the wall and stored it carefully. At that time, there was nothing on the wall. However, five years later (1993), he was surprised when he found some shadowy/dim image of Mao's portrait emerging on the wall, just where they had originally hung the portrait. Half a year later, the image was getting clearer. Quickly, the news got round, with people claiming that Mao Almighty appeared to them. Peasants in the area came in flocks to see and visit this mystical image of Mao's apparition.

The householder Tian told Cao that he and his family hadn't thought so many people from all over the country, including Hong Kong and Taiwan, would visit. Some people came just out of curiosity, but more people came because of their reverence for Mao. Many of them went down on their knees and kowtowed to the image of Mao's apparition as soon as they saw it, some with tears running down their cheeks. Poor householders couldn't afford kowtow cushions, so their pillows served in their stead.

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<sup>33</sup> The news came from the blog of a photographer and columnist, named Zhang Xiang'ou. More details can be found at <http://zhangxiangou.blshe.com/post/28/40167> (cite September 16, 2010)

Cao also found that, during the latest three years, there were about over 500 comments in 16 visitors' books. According to his estimate based on the records, over 15,000 people had visited.

Some visitor's remarks were:

"Chairman Mao, Chinese people will remember you always!"

"Your sunshine illuminates every corner of the land forever!"

"Chairman Mao is an immortal god."

"Look forward to see you, Chairman Mao, come back again!"

"The Chairman, we haven't seen you for 20 years. What a pleasure to meet you here today. Hope you could go on instructing our Chinese revolution, and could bless Chinese people's happiness and well-being."

"Chairman Mao is more attractive and great than everyone who lives now."

"Chairman Mao, we working class need you!"

"Chairman Mao, Chinese revolution cannot go on without you."

These remarks are characteristic of typical Chinese folk religion. Visual representations of Mao's cult reveal even more similarity to Chinese folk religion. For example: images of deities are located in the house or in shrines; the domestic/family altar has a prominent location in the house; on the altar there are candlesticks and an incense censer; one or two kowtow cushions lie on the ground in front of altar, etc. For these Mao worshipers, God Mao is already a powerful deity with spiritual, protective and bewitching efficacy, and they pray to him for their safety and health.

## **Chapter 5**

### **An Alternative Understanding of Chinese Religious Culture**

Mao's absolute and supreme authority pervaded virtually every aspect of the daily lives of Chinese people during the Cultural Revolution, and its manifestations, as I have shown, were full of religious features. However, this has been a controversial topic since then, as it is difficult to define the ambiguous character of Chinese religions. It is also very difficult to ignore the religious features of Mao's cult.

#### **Arguments for the Religious Features of Mao's Cult**

Ninian Smart's *Mao* is one of the earliest books which argued for the analogical features between Mao's cult and a religion. For Smart, it was obvious that Mao's cult contained analogically all the ingredients of a religion, which can be categorized into six dimensions: the doctrinal, the mythic, the ethical, the ritual, the experimental, and the social or institutional (Smart, 1974, p. 83). Therefore, it can be argued that "Maoism does function analogically as a religion for China" (Smart, 1974, p. 93). He also noticed that the CCP had taken many measures to restrain Chinese traditional religions, but he argues that "a religiously anti-religious zeal" in the Cultural Revolution "wanted to replace religion..." (Smart, 1974, p. 86). That is to say, the formation of the Mao's Cult was based on rooting out its heresy by force, and that this also resembled the exclusiveness of religious beliefs. Smart also employed religious terms with respect to Maoism, such as "sacred rituals", "an articulated and authoritative set of doctrines", "evangelical morality", "Maoist eschatology" etc. (Smart, 1974).

The Italian writer, Alberto Moravia, mentioned before, associates the cult of Mao and the ubiquity of the Red Book with the traditional culture of Confucianism. Confucianism was the dominant ancient Chinese official religion, albeit that its definition as a religion is problematic<sup>34</sup>. He argues that the cult of Mao during the Cultural Revolution was "the Confucianization of Marx's thought" and "the Confucianization of Maoism" (Moravia, 1968, p. 39).

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<sup>34</sup> On the discussion on whether Confucianism is a religion or not, please refer to Yong Chen's dissertation, "On the Rhetoric of Defining Confucianism as 'a Religion' " (Chen, 2005).

Raymond Whitehead considers Maoism as “God’s saving power” in China (quoted in Janz, 1998, p. 139); and Stefan R. Landsberger considers Mao as a Chinese traditional Kitchen God (Landsberger, 1996, 2002). Scholars who have the same views include Kitagawa (1974), MacInnis (1969), and Woo (1973), who “regard Maoism as a ‘religion’, a ‘quasi-religion’, or a ‘religion surrogate’ ” (Caldarola, 1982, p. 570) .

Beside these, a current famous scholar who demonstrates clearly the religious aspects of Mao’s cult is Stefan R. Landsberger (Landsberger, 1996, 2002). His essay *Mao as the Kitchen God: Religious Aspects of the Mao’s cult during the Cultural Revolution* focuses on those propaganda pictures of Mao during the 1960s. He expatiates on how these pictures represented Mao as a brilliant hero and moral super model, and how these sacrosanct pictures were worshiped and replaced Chinese families’ previous worship of their ancestors. Comparing him with the Kitchen God who needs to report to a supreme god, Mao was already a superior being. Furthermore, unlike the picture of the Kitchen God, Mao’s portraits were sacrosanct and not allowed to be thrown away or contaminated. If they were, the person responsible could be convicted as a counter-revolutionary committing a sacrilegious act. Although Landsberger makes a penetrating analysis on the religious aspects of Mao’s cult, his central argument emphasizes the CCP’s hegemony over culture.

However, religious aspects of Mao’s cult in this political mass movement still manifested quite explicit political connotations. That is the reason why there are some critiques of equating Maoism with religion. Critics commonly charge that Maoism should be counted as a political tactics at most. Raymond Pong and Carlo Caldarola explicitly object to “the definition of Maoism as a religion”, and state “it would be inaccurate to talk of the worship of Mao in the same sense as the worship of Buddha, the gods, or the ancestors” (Caldarola, 1982, p 571). Other scholars agree that the cult of Mao was just one of the political tactics used by Mao (Bouc & Mao, 1977; Dittmer, 1980; Schram, 1984; Tsou, 1969).

Therefore, some scholars used another halfway terminology --- Eric Voegelin’s political religion --- when they mentioned Mao’s cult (Goodin 1981; Hyden 1967; Myers 1989). As far as Voegelin’s understanding goes, a political religion is replete with cults, symbols, rituals and even violence.

Using a new concept to analyze Mao's cult is an attempt to recognize these religious features, while differentiating the cult from traditional religions in ancient China. Although there were religious ritual activities during the Cultural Revolution, just as Zuo Jiping argued, "there is little difference between the political religion and the traditional religion of China" (Zuo, 1991). And "...at the same time as it attempted to destroy traditional religious activities, the Chinese communist regime initiated and encouraged a new religion centered around Mao Zedong..." (Zuo, 1991).

Emilio Gentile, the author of *Politics as Religion* (2006), analyzes and summarizes most of the foregoing arguments and descriptions about the sacralization of the Chinese Communist Party and the deification of Mao. As a conclusion, he argues that,

The transformation of Maoism into a political religion, which is inherent in the ideological dogmatism and political monopoly of the Communist Party, resulted from an initiative from below, producing a politico-religious syncretism in which Maoist ideology mixed with Confucianism, Taoist mysticism, and popular religiosity (Gentile, 2006, p. 124).

No matter how different the point of emphasis and the angle of analysis, all of these arguments reveal that the religious features in Mao's cult cannot be ignored. Nevertheless, all these arguments are entangled in another problem: whether Mao's cult is a religion or not. Moreover, thinking in terms of the western ideas on religion, China, obviously, is an unreligious/irreligious country. Compared with Western religions, it is reasonable to assume that Chinese people have lacked religious belief, and that ideologies with secularism and utilitarianism have been widely accepted and practiced throughout Chinese history. As we know, Chinese agricultural civilization urged people to consider ethics more important than religions. That is why western scholars consider that there is not a transcendent religion in China, and the majority of Chinese are non-religious, practical, and this-worldly, let alone such a modern and secular cult containing explicit political content. Obviously, this results in another more controversial issue: how to define a religious phenomenon in China, both for Chinese and foreign scholars; or, how you might use the word religion in a Chinese context.

## The Uses of Words: Religion and Zong Jiao

The word “religion” as it is used in China was imported by the Japanese from the west in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Japanese translated the English word “religion” into Chinese as *Zong Jiao* (宗教) during the late Tokugawa period<sup>35</sup>. As an exotic word, *Zong Jiao* has its own connotation in China, which is different from that of the western word ‘religion’. Putting aside the complexity of understanding the connotation of the word ‘religion’ in the west, it is necessary to clarify two questions regarding the status of today’s use of “*Zong Jiao*” in China.

Firstly, the import of “*Zong Jiao*”, to a large extent, changed the traditional religious research situation which was based on a single religious perspective, such as Buddhism, or Daoism. According to a Chinese scholar, He Guanglu, since the word for religion, “*Zong Jiao*”, was introduced into China, “Chinese religious research has begun to treat various religions as a whole rationally and objectively...and so-called religious studies in China have grown up therefrom” (G. He, 2003). This point of view obviously follows from the understanding of Friedrich Max Müller, who considers that the science of religion should neither be based on a standpoint from one particular religion, nor object to other religions with its own doctrines. It should be dealt with by a scientific attitude. In this thesis, I would not discuss any specific religion. I would rather treat religion as a general social phenomenon that can be approached with a scientific attitude.

Secondly, what the use of the word “*Zong Jiao*” means here relates to the actual use of this word in a certain social environment. In China, there are two levels of meaning in its use: one is on the academic or official level; the other is on the folk cultural level. These two levels are mutually related, but more importantly, mutually independent. In this thesis, to differentiate these two levels is a prerequisite/premise for further research.

For instance, the queries about Chinese religious culture, which are put forward by western scholars, come mainly from the following three arguments: the first one is that, except for Buddhism, there is no transcendent religion in China; the second argument is that, in modern China, anti-religion became the cultural mainstream since the New Cultural Movement<sup>36</sup>; and

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<sup>35</sup> The last shogunate in Japan (1603–1867), founded by Tokugawa Ieyasu (1543–1616). The shogunate was followed by the restoration of imperial power under Meiji Tenno.

<sup>36</sup> The New Cultural Movement was a Chinese Enlightenment during 1917-1921, which grew out of the disillusionment with traditional Chinese culture by some brilliant intellectuals and scholars, like Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi, Li Dazhao, etc.

the third is that, after the founding of the PRC, the Chinese people were instilled by the governmental propaganda of atheism, which induced them to become non-religious.

The crux of these arguments lies in how to distinguish two levels of the situation of the use of “*Zong Jiao*” in China. At the first level, the theories involved are theology and philosophy, which are far more reached than what common Chinese people can realize. At the second level, the criticism of religion mostly came from intellectuals and politicians, such as Hu Shi, Chen Duxiou etc. The common people were still living in their own set of beliefs and practices. Likewise, for the third argument, the fact that atheism as the dominant ideology of the People’s Republic of China really gives people the feeling that China is/was an unreligious country. However, most folk religious customs are still popular in the lives of common people.

That is to say, the word *Zong Jiao*, rather than an obscure term in need of technical definition, is a commonly used and widely understood term in the Chinese people’s everyday language,. Indeed, when Chinese people use the word *Zong Jiao*, most of the time they use the word unreflectively, as if it were completely self-defining. Therefore, two levels of the situation of the use of *Zong Jiao* should be distinguished in this thesis. I will call the first level as the top-level religion, and the other level as the bottom-level religion.

Thirdly, it is inevitable to discuss the Chinese religious problem through western frameworks of thought, if we have to use the English word ‘religion’ to translate *Zong Jiao*. If we are rooted in this way of thinking, it is sometimes very hard to say that, in China, the so called non-religious phenomenon is really non-religious, and vice versa. Obviously, when we use the word ‘religion’, and subsequently *Zong Jiao*, our research has have been contaminated covertly by a western way of thinking, and even a western values system. As Fitzgerald says, “western concepts...can so easily project distorted meanings onto the data” from other non-western societies (Fitzgerald, 2000, p. 9).

However, if we drop this word in a Chinese context, it is hard for us to find another word that is more precise and more convenient for our discussion. In terms of the reality of our research, it makes no sense to delete this word totally from our analytical categories. This problem has already been considered by some Chinese scholars who specialize in Chinese culture. As Jiang Qing put it, the words *Zong Jiao* and ‘religion’, to be more exact, are more

to be borrowed than to be used in China (Jiang, 2004). That is to say, although we have to use the word as a general category, we still need to put it in a specific historical and social context.

If we borrow the word religion to replace *Zong Jiao* in the Chinese context, the research on Chinese religious culture could not overlook the connotation of the word ‘religion’ in the west. My argument here is to suggest that the connotation of religion in the Chinese religious culture is based on the western religious culture, but has a different emphasis, which will be interpreted further in the next part below. Therefore, we need not avoid the western conception totally, but we do have to make a distinction. If there is no need to stress the difference between religion and *Zong Jiao*, then these two words in this thesis can be used interchangeably.

### **The Uses of the Word Religion: From Western to Non-western Cultures**

The research on the connotation of the word ‘religion’ in the west is also complicated. The current profusion of data and materials about these debates make it almost impossible for any individual to deal with them thoroughly and exhaustively.

The word ‘religion’ is a modern English word, whose etymological origins have been obscure and ambiguous. In *An etymological dictionary of the English language* by Professor Skeat, he explains that “Religion, piety, the performance of duties to God and man, (F.-L.?) in early use. Spelt *religion* ... Allied to *religens*, fearing the gods, pious. [And therefore not derived from *religare*, to bind.] The opposite of *negligens*, negligent ... Allied also to *di-ligens*, diligent ...” (Skeat, 1910). Walde (1938) connects the word religion with the idea of choice and interest. The earlier etymological sense, if traced back far enough, derives religion from *relegere*, to go through and over again in reading and thought; or from *religare*, to bind (Hoyt, 1912). Also, it is worthy of note that, “In the Authorized Version, *religion* is used of outward forms rather than of the inner spirit ... *Religion* was so used by Jeremy Taylor (c.1613-1637)” as meaning the *rites* and *ceremonies* of religion ...” (Hoyt, 1912).

From these original etymological senses, the earliest use of the word religion could be reduced to two major dimensions (see Table 2.1). And at least, at the earliest time, one can find that neither of the two dimensions was over-emphasized. It is not an original way to



construct the word religion like this, but the hypothesis here is that these two dimensions are both essential aspects of the future religious culture, no matter how the meaning of this word changes afterward, and no matter how obscure the meaning of this word gets.

External Dimensions	Inner Dimension
as external restrictions;	as inner spiritual experience;
as actual functions;	as an attitude of life <sup>37</sup> ;
as outward forms;	as reverence for gods;
as a practice of reverence;	

FIGURE 7 Dimensions of the earliest uses of the word ‘religion’ in the west

For instance, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, a scholar of the comparative study of religion, manages to replace the word ‘religion’ with two other concepts. If one analyzes his consideration of the word ‘religion’, you will find that the lives of religious men were dichotomized by Smith as existing in two worlds: “the mundane realm” and “the transcendent realm”(Smith, 1964, p. 139). Based on this dichotomy Smith (1964) replaces ‘religion’ with two separate concepts, “cumulative tradition” and “faith” (Smith, 1964, p. 175). Obviously, the former belongs to the external dimension, and the latter belongs to the internal dimension. In other words, even though Smith seeks to drop the word ‘religion’, the two dimensions are still there.

A similar analysis can be found in one of the lectures of Friedrich Max Müller, who in 1870 presented two different senses in the use of the word ‘religion’. For Müller, in one sense, we meant religion as “a body of doctrines handed down by tradition”; and in the other sense, we meant religion as “a mental faculty or disposition which , independent of, nay, in spite of sense and reason, enables man to apprehend the Infinite under different names and under varying disguises”(Müller, 2005, pp. 13-14). However, in my opinion, Müller put his special emphasis on the second sense, which he coined as a new phrase “the faculty of faith” (Müller, 2005, p. 14).

From these earliest etymological senses, it is hard to say whether these, which related to

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<sup>37</sup> See Smith Wilfred Cantwell (1964:23-26) for an elaboration of this theme.

religion, were the human inner disposition or not. If these were the human inner disposition, that means the inner feeling/experience of human being, and even those corresponding outward acts of them, were both ineluctable in their lives, as well as their society. Whereas, if these were not human dispositions, then there must be something outside of them to prompt/drive people to feel and act like that. However, the result may be the same, i.e. something related to religion that still existed. Anyway, it could also be inferred that the word 'religion' was used to refer to something objective existing in the human's lives and societies.

However, how can one be sure that so-called religion is really a religion? Similarly, how can one be sure that so-called non-religion is really not a religion? The questions have become prominent along with the spread of the word 'religion'.

In the next few centuries, as the word 'religion' evolved, the explanations and connotations of this word have been getting more and more complicated. On the one hand, more detailed and systematic assignments of theological, philosophical, ethical/moral and sociological meanings are attributed to this word. Moreover, these explanations or definitions are not only put forward by a multiplicity of religious believers from their given cultural traditions, but also by those outside tradition such as religious observers or critics (Smith, 1964, p. 16). Therefore, the precise definition of religion is seemingly almost an impossible task (Hutchison, 1991; Idinopulos, 1998; Jones, 2007; Larue, 2003). For instance, John A. Hutchison, in his book *"Paths of Faith"*, points out this difficulty and provides his own understanding:

Formal definitions of religion are as numerous, as various, and often as mutually conflicting as there are students of religion. Often such definitions illustrate the oriental parable of the blind men describing the elephant, each taking hold of part of the beast and defining the whole in terms of this part. Like the elephant, religion is a large and complex phenomenon. In this connection, some historians of religion question or reject the word religion as a distortion of the form of experience it seeks to communicate. Several of the world's major languages lack any word that can be adequately translated as "religion." The common noun religion imputes a unity or homogeneity of experience that many observers believe does not exist (Hutchison, 1991).

Just as Hutchison said, faced with this seemingly insoluble dilemma, some scholars began to

doubt the necessity of a definition of religion. For example, as early as 1964, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, as mentioned above, propounded that we should “drop” the term religion, and replace it with two separate concepts, “cumulative tradition” and “faith”, to express what we call “religion”(Smith, 1964, p. 141).

Compared to those who contrive to provide a precise definition of religion, Smith, is bold enough to “deconstruct” the word religion. He himself calls this “deconstruction” “a new conceptual apparatus or theoretical framework” (Smith, 1964, p. 175). No matter whether his “deconstruction” is worthy of agreement<sup>38</sup>, what is more important is his elaboration by which he explains why he provides such an evasive-seeming device to “outflank” his problem.

First, from Smith’s argument, it is obvious that it is the pluralism of religion that warrants dropping the word ‘religion’. He hammers in the inadequacy of the word ‘religion’ for some non-western societies, “especially in the oriental religions [in which] it is almost impossible to think of “religion” as we moderns are wont to think of it” (Rackman, 1965).

It is true, as Smith mentioned, there is not the equivalent word for the English word ‘religion’ in many non-western contexts. Also, in the newest edition of *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, you cannot find an entry “religion, terms relating to” anymore. Instead, one finds a series of entries about religion following a certain determiner (Hornblower & Spawforth, 2009). That is to say, the word ‘religion’ should not be considered as a general word, but a concrete word used in specific concrete social environments.

Smith uses a word “reification” to describe the modern evolution of religion. He points out that before reification, the word/concept religion signified “inner personal orientation” (Smith, 1964, p. 51). However, gradually, “we move from considering this personal quality of life to thinking rather of an organized system” (Smith, 1964, p. 51). That is what he means by “reification”: “mentally making religion into a thing, gradually coming to conceive it as an objective systematic entity” (Smith, 1964, p. 50). In my opinion, the process of reification denotes a process in which the emphasis transfers from the inner to the external dimension. Or rather, since the word ‘religion’ appears in the non-western context, the word ‘religion’

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<sup>38</sup> Actually, Wilfred Cantwell Smith also gave up his idea of replacing religion with the two other concepts later.

has begun to emphasize the external dimension more than before.

Similarly, another scholar Timothy Fitzgerald agrees with Smith that the category “religion” has no useful role to play as a scholarly analytic tool. He argues “the word ‘religion’...is analytically redundant” and “it picks out nothing distinctive and it clarifies nothing. It merely distorts the field” (Fitzgerald, 2000, p. 17). Likewise, let us neglect his argument of using the word religion as a mystified analytical category. What I am concerned with here is his discussion of the transformation meaning of the word ‘religion’.

In his book, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, in order to prove the analytical usefulness of the word ‘religion’, Fitzgerald heavily emphasizes the distinction between the theological uses of the word ‘religion’ from the non-theological uses of the word. For Fitzgerald, the concept of religion and the so called religious study is disguised by western ideological loading, to be specific, liberal ecumenical theology in traditional Christian culture (Fitzgerald, 2000, p. 6). The relatively indiscriminate use of the word ‘religion’, especially in cross-cultural analysis, therefore means “a part of a historical ideological process” (Fitzgerald, 2000, p. 8). Fitzgerald’s arguments actually provide a transferring process of the meaning of religion in a non-western context, in which the belief in Christian culture has been transferred from the supernatural to some secular practices and institutions, politically and ideologically.

For non-western societies, following Fitzgerald’s argument, this process involves an imposition. However, if we view the issue from another perspective, then the importation of the word ‘religion’ from the west, actually means the word itself has a more secular and even ideological loading in those non-western societies.

Furthermore, what I would like to emphasize here is that, with the export of the word ‘religion’ from western to non-western cultures, there is an unexpected and hidden tendency to use the word religion in a more secular sense, i.e., the word ‘religion’ has begun to emphasise the external dimension more than before.

The problem here, if the meaning of the word ‘religion’ has been changed so much, is whether we should find better alternatives by which to research problems in non-western societies. However, although it is the pluralism in different non-western contexts that made

some scholars begin to reconsider this problem, the adjective “religious” still survived in their writings. It actually indicates that the obscurity of the word ‘religion’, even the intractable problem of defining the word, cannot wipe out the distinct and explicit existence of religious phenomena in non-western societies. Therefore, maybe we need to rethink the definition of the word ‘religion’, when it is imported into some non-western societies.

If the use of a word has to imply the true or something objectively existing, the definition of this word should be precise. What is true? And what can be considered to exist objectively? To answer these questions one may have to go into the ontology of philosophy. According to the classical works from Hume or Kant, written some centuries ago, but not out-dated, proved that what is the thing-in-itself and how it exists, are both unknowable. If this is true, how can one define a word with explicit certainty?

Richard Robinson, in his book *Definition*, says,

Have definitions a truth value? The search for definitions in Plato’s dialogues is represented as a search for a certain kind of true statement, and when proposed definitions rejected it is usually because they are held to be false statement. But today it is often maintained that a definition cannot be either true or false, because it is not a statement but rather a command, not a proposition but a proposal (Robinson, 1950, p. 5).

In my opinion, this is a kind of pragmatic, as well as useful, attitude about definition. In many non-western contexts, it is better to use, or borrow this word to elucidate some certain specific phenomena, than to get entangled in what the word exactly means.

Therefore, we do not need to abandon the word ‘religion’, but this does not mean that we have to use this word to process our research problems. To reduce unnecessary controversies, we prefer to use the adjective “religious”.

To sum up, it will prove to be of little avail to indulge in speculations on such questions, if based on the Western conceptual framework. Since the 19th century, the construction of western modernity and its colonial expansion, have led most non-western developing countries to a “standard” model of development, economically and culturally. Therefore, analysis of issues by western theories and conceptual frameworks has spontaneously become

the main approach among non-western scholars. Generally, for non-western societies, the notions and values of so-called normative modernity have evolved from hegemonies of western ideology and cultures, but have been disguised as authorities of knowledge, and furthermore as a universalism of general values. Whereas, if we view the issue from another angle and take into account the Chinese social and cultural context, we might find that the modern cult of Mao is just an alternative to the Western style/model.

## **Chapter 6**

### **An Alternative Religious Cult**

#### **The Rejection of Tradition vs. Traditional Religious Features**

As outlined above, modernity in China is filled with various paradoxes. But the biggest paradox of early Chinese modernization lies in the period from the May Fourth Movement to the 1970s: the adoption of western modern ideas accompanied by the drastic rejection of traditional culture. However these efforts failed to make the early PRC a modern country with democracy and freedom. Rather, under the cover of Marxism and socialist democracy, a modern dictatorship merged with traditional culture, and the Chinese people cultivated a new belief and raised a new deity for the country. It became the distinct feature of the early modernization of the PRC. The Cultural Revolution of the 1960s can be seen as the climax of this alternative modernization.

As both an intensive and extreme manifestation of Chinese modernization, Mao's cult during the Cultural Revolution also exposed conflicts and problems within Chinese modernization (Liu, 1996, p. 387). In his analysis, Liu Xiaofeng identifies several features of the Chinese modern social environment before the Cultural Revolution, in which the PRC under the leadership of the CCP had already been, to a large extent, a modern nation state with its own characteristics (ibid). However, in order to emphasize the modern features of the Cultural Revolution, Liu disagrees that there wasn't any inevitability to the outbreak of this movement. It occurred because of some structural dysfunctions rooted in Chinese modernization. Moreover, Liu also disagrees that there were any traditional factors mixed into this movement (ibid).

However, in my view, Liu's explanation fails to explain why the structural dysfunctions in the Cultural Revolution contained considerable similarity to those in the Chinese traditional political and religious culture, which clearly belonged to the "feudal" period.

Meanwhile, some people seemed to believe that the consequence of a series of upheavals, such as the dethroning of the emperor, and the establishment of the People's Republic of China, should lead to a modern China with democracy and freedom. For instance, the

traditional religious culture was attacked as “feudal” superstition, and it seemed as though the new China was already in the process of “the disenchantment of the world” --- one of the signs of modern secularization (Weber, 1978a, p.155). Unfortunately, the issue is not as straightforward as that.

Traditional cultures, as well as capitalist cultures, which are the opposite of advanced modern socialist and communist cultures, were attacked as backward cultures which hindered the development of modernization. In fact, for most Chinese people it was not easy to break away from the traditional way of thinking; the behavior of most Chinese people was still dominated by a tradition that was non-reflexive. Under the flag of socialism and communism, the CCP and its leader Chairman Mao, actually occupied the position of an unchallengeable supremacy, just like an emperor. Similarly, his followers were, outwardly at least, receptive to this kind of authority and rule. This is precisely the paradox of the confrontation and tension between traditional culture and modernity.

Therefore, when we look at the process of Chinese modernization, my suggestion here is that we should not ignore factors of Chinese traditional culture; we need to take the continuity of Chinese traditional culture into account. That is to say, although what happened in the Cultural Revolution was undoubtedly an accompaniment to the rise of the modern state, simultaneously, the cult of Mao also was a consequence of the ubiquity of traditional culture; especially the rituals of the cult especially were filled up with Chinese traditional cultural elements. For instance, Mao’s portrait was always above the home altar, where their ancestral tablets had been placed before.

The name “cultural revolution” and its implied sense of “cultural criticism” easily lead people to mistake it as a movement only concerned with cultural issues. In fact, the Cultural Revolution was not only a movement focusing on culture itself, but more on social-political purposes, in particular on power struggles. The cultural criticism was just used an excuse for further strengthening the dominant position of the ideology of the CCP. Meanwhile, in the elimination of the traditional culture, as well as a capitalist culture, the major goal was to eradicate any other different cultures and ideologies different from the ideology of the CCP. The CCP had no tolerance for other ideologies in that period, in the same way as religious sects would not tolerate heretics. For example, Mao’s Red Guards “perpetrated the worst horrors against religious praxis ---killing and maiming, forcing religious individuals into acts



against their beliefs, invading their homes to destroy any vestiges of religion” (Fowler and Fowler 2008, p. 251). Obviously, all other cultures and beliefs were forced out by the ideology of the new party, which, I am claiming, eventually had become a religion with Chinese characteristics for the people at that time.

It is beyond words to show how absurd and ludicrous it was when the political movement became a show of religious fanaticism during the Cultural Revolution. The tragic “ten year’s catastrophe” was far beyond everyone’s imagination<sup>39</sup>, similar to the way Giddens compares modernity to an adventure experiment beyond human’s control:

On the global level, therefore, modernity has become experimental. We are all, willy-nilly, caught up in a grand experiment, which is at the one time our doing --- as human agents --- yet to an imponderable degree outside of our control. It is not an experiment in the laboratory sense, because we do not govern the outcomes within fixed parameters – it is more like a dangerous adventure, in which each of us has to participate whether we like it or not (Giddens, 1994, p. 59).

Admittedly, the Cultural Revolution, as an adventure of modernity, was also a grand experiment, the outcome of which was unknown which also retained the potential for bright future for the Chinese, who at that time devoted themselves to seeking the way to their liberation and modernization. But the venture failed. Shortly after the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, almost all of the government and administrative organs became dysfunctional, and the whole country faced the imminent danger of disintegration<sup>40</sup>.

Thus, it is clear, that when modern democracy was mixed with such traditional elements, Chinese modernity and modernization had already moved away from the western trajectory of modernity. The most distinctive feature of early Chinese modernization, from the Enlightenment to the Cultural Revolution, is the politicization of culture and everyday life.

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<sup>39</sup> During this turbulent decade, the whole of China was flung into confusion, and “millions of people were killed, committed suicide, or suffered unspeakable hardships both physically and psychologically”. See Chang, Tony H. 1999. *China during the Cultural Revolution, 1966-1976: A Selected Bibliography of English Language Works*. London: Greenwood Press., p vii.

<sup>40</sup> At the beginning of the Cultural Revolution, schools were closed, and organized students group, the Red Guards, attacked their teachers, and then “capitalist roaders” in positions of authority, who were normally top party officials. Their violence affected all aspects of public life and its development. Subsequent factionalism within the Red Guards resulted in mass “physical struggle” (武斗) all over the country. All of these left the country in chaos.

## **Traditional Religious Features vs. Mao's Cult**

As mentioned above, traditional religions were restricted as superstitions of an ignorant populace during the Cultural Revolution. However, another ideology with religious features, Mao's cult, penetrated into the everyday lives of Chinese people. It is worth noting that all these religious features came from Chinese traditional religions, as explained in the following discussion.

For Chinese traditional religions, it is a fact that various religious activities in Chinese traditional society constitute a vague and ambiguous system. It seems that Chinese religions lack organization and a theological system. However, compared with western religions, Chinese religions are better analyzed by a structure-function approach --- rather than a theological approach. According to the well-known research on Chinese religions from C. K. Yang, religions in Chinese society can be divided into two forms:

Applying the structure-function approach to Chinese society, we can discern two structural forms of religion. One is institutional religion, which has a system of theology, rituals, and organization of its own, independent of other secular social institutions. It is a social institution by itself, having its own basic concepts and its own structural system. The other is diffused religion, with its theology, rituals, and organization intimately merged with the concepts and structure of secular institutions and other aspects of the social order (Yang, 1961, p. 20).

So far, Yang's classification is the most valuable reference for understanding the features of religious activities in Chinese society. As in his classification, a notable feature of diffused religion is that some religious activities cannot exist in the society without "the concepts and structure of secular institutions and other aspects of the social order". Furthermore, his research also shows that 'diffused religion', has a higher popularity in Chinese society. This is evidenced by the following data provided by Yang about the distribution of cults in a small county in China (Yang, 1961, p. 24).

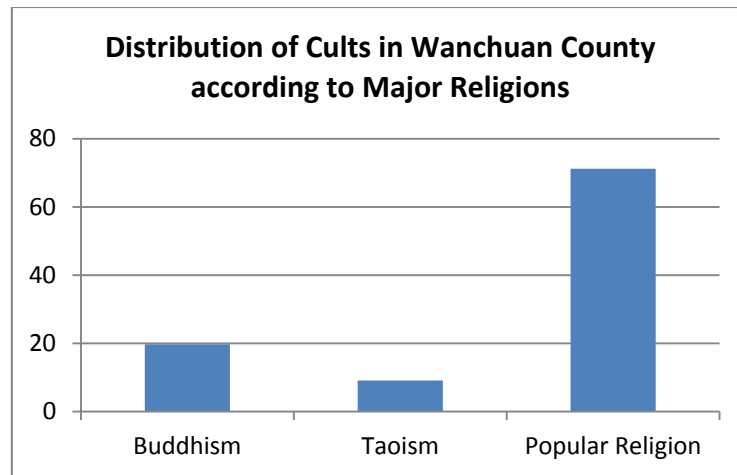


FIGURE 8 The Proportion extent of Popular Religion in Chinese Society

Nevertheless, as a complex and syncretic system, there are various practices and various “Shen” (神, god or goddess) in the ‘diffused religion’. It is reasonable to classify the system of these “Shens” into three categories, nature worship, ancestor worship, and the worship of saints.

With reference to nature worship, in my understanding, there are three sources for these Shen. The first one is the personification and deification of Heaven (or Heaven-and-Earth), the highest level in the system of Chinese religion. During the feudal period, one approach of the imperial power was to monopolize the right to worship Heaven by the Emperor. Actually, all emperors were alleged to be “the son of the Heaven”, whose ruling was blessed by Heaven. All of these were later theorized by a Confucian scholar, Dong Zhongshu during the Han Dynasty, to form the legitimacy of a monarch, known as “*interactions between Heaven and Mankind*”. Since then, the sacralization of political leaders became a part of official belief through the worship of Heaven, and the emperor was viewed as the only representative of Heaven.

The second category of Shens came from the personification of some abstract concepts of people’s secular wishes, such as “Cai Shen” (财神, God of Wealth), “Shou Shen”(寿星, God of Longevity), and “Song Zi Liangliang” (生子娘娘, Goddess of Fertility). The third category of Shens were created to take charge of some important social or family activities, such as “Zao Shen”(灶神, God of Kitchen), “Tu Di Gong”(土地公, God of the earth), and “Chen Huang”(城隍, God of City).

As for the ancestor worship, it was a ritual practice to reinforce the unity of family and lineage. For those living family members, their deceased ancestors possessed the ability to bless the peace of the whole family and the fortune of the living. As for the Shens in Saints worship (圣人崇拜, *shen-ren chong-bai*), they normally originated from some historical figures, who were venerated for their brilliance and virtues, the famous one being “Guan Gong”(关公, God of War).

In addition, it was a very common phenomenon for a tablet of “Tian Di Jun Qin Shi”<sup>41</sup> (天地君亲师) to be placed for worship in the homes of Chinese people after the later period of the Ming Dynasty (Xu, 2006). This was another worship system existing in Chinese ‘diffused’ popular religion, which originated from Chinese primeval religion, but then blended into Confucianism<sup>42</sup>. According to a Chinese scholar, Xu Zi’s research, “Tian Di Jun Qin Shi”, was both a kind of religious belief, and also a sort of symbol of ethical significance. It signified a set of value orientations, which were connected to the reverence toward a sort of transcendence coming from nature, the sovereign, the ancestors, and teachers/mentors.

As far as the objects of worship are concerned, this system syncretized the above three categories of religious worship, which are nature worship, ancestor worship and saints worship. During the feudal period, patriarchal relationships and the “feudal” ideology were intensified by this system of worship.

According to the above sketchy map of the religious features of Chinese religions, the cult of Mao is understandable in the context of Chinese religious culture. On the whole, when Mao was an object of worship, his status was respectively similar to “Tian Di Jun Qin Shi”, which syncretized all categories of religious worship in Chinese ‘diffused religion’.

First of all, during the Cultural Revolution, one of the most popular slogans was that “Chairman Mao is the red sun in our hearts”, which later became a name for a song of hymns to Mao. Also, a propaganda poster with Mao’s portrait amid red rays of the sun, was captioned “All living things depend on the sun for their growth”. Mao was treated as great as

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<sup>41</sup> Literally, “Tian” means the Heaven; “Di” means the Earth; “Jun” means sovereign; “Qin” means blood relatives or ancestors and “Shi” means teacher or great masters.

<sup>42</sup> There is not explicit textual evidence to show the exact time when “Tian Di Jun Qin Shi” blended into Confucianism.

the sun, and as important as the sun. And because the significance of Mao could not be expressed in words, he was symbolized as the sun. Moreover, when people were informed about Mao's death, most of them felt the bottom had dropped out of their worlds, just as if "the heaven fell" out of their worlds. Symbolizing Mao as the red sun counted as a kind of nature worship. .

On the other hand, Mao was also worshiped as a supreme emperor in modern China, and his authority was absolutely beyond dispute for a long time. Not only was he a leader in the traditional monarchical way, but also most of his colleagues, not to mention most ordinary people, considered loyalty to Mao equaled devotion to the country. In other words, his status as the emperor was one of reasons for the rise of the cult of Mao.

Furthermore, during the Cultural Revolution, for most followers, the relationship to Mao was closer than that to their parents. At that time, in almost all families, the tablets of their ancestors were replaced by the statue or the portrait of Mao. As it was forbidden to burn incense to Mao, which was viewed as traditional superstition, the ritual of worship was changed to "ask for instruction in the morning and make a report in the evening".

However, the connotation of Mao's cult shifted after the 1990s. The rituals of Mao's cult became more similar to the worship of the deceased ancestor, and then his statues and portraits were worshiped by burning incense at home or in some temples. Moreover, when Mao's image was hung in a taxi, it functioned as a talisman to ward off evil and calamities and bring good luck.

Finally, Mao had become the spiritual teacher because he was recognized as the primary source of official ideology. It was his blend with Marxism with Chinese characteristics that guided the Chinese people to successfully revolt against imperialism and feudalism, and then to enter into a specific process of Chinese socialist modernization. During the Cultural Revolution, one of Mao's titles<sup>43</sup> was "great teacher", and his thought was seen to be possessed of miraculous powers. It was reported in official publications that one of the miraculous functions of Mao's thought was to cure many diseases<sup>44</sup>. Moreover, the famous

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<sup>43</sup> Mao's title during the Cultural Revolution was called the "Four Greats": the Great Leader, Great Helmsman, Great Supreme Commander and Great Teacher.

<sup>44</sup> One of the reports from the *Liberation Army Daily* of the thirteenth of May, 1969, said that some deaf-mutes could

little red books, Mao's quotations from his works, were published and distributed free to everyone, and became the guide book for everything in the people's daily lives.

To sum up the above arguments, although what happened during the Cultural Revolution is an episode in the rise of the modern state, the cult of Mao is a consequence of the pervasiveness of traditional culture, especially the traditional religious cultural elements. On the other hand, although the religious features of Mao's cult are very obvious, they defy easy classification. One important reason for this is syncretism, which is one of the features of traditional Chinese religious culture. Even though the communist movement in China, as one of the Chinese efforts of pursuing modernity, has worked hard to break from the "backward" and "feudal" tradition of Chinese culture, such traditions have persisted and become part of the modernity created by the communist movement. From this perspective, Mao's cult can be understood as part of an alternative modernity created by the Chinese communist movement.

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speaking again by learning Mao's thought; another report of *People Daily* published on Tenth of August, 1971, reported that Mao's thought cured some people with mental disease.

## **Chapter 7**

### **An Alternative “Non-religious” Cult**

Obviously, there exist sharp distinctions between the old Mao cult and the new one. Two scholars, Zhou and Yao, argue that the old Mao cult, which happened during the Cultural Revolution, was a variation of the traditional worship of ancestors, whereas the new one was the imitation of the traditional worship of supernatural beings. So, the roles of Mao in the cults of the two periods are also different. In the old cult, Mao was respected as a father of all the people in China. Chinese Confucian culture attaches much significance to the image of the father as the absolute authority in the state and families. However, in today's Mao's cult, Mao is treated as a deity or an apotropaic symbol (Zhou & Yao, 2003).

However, in my opinion, the biggest difference between the old Mao's cult and the new one lies in the manifestation of their religious features. The old cult was accompanied by an asserted atheism and the absolute rejection of unreason. And at the same time, through destroying traditional culture, the religious features of the old Mao cult were a forbidden and dangerous topic at that time. Whereas the new cult is throwing this off, revealing more religious features, although there still exist some non-religious Mao's cults at the same time.

No matter how different they are, these traditional religious features have had a profound impact on Chinese modernization. Furthermore, it is reasonable to say that, rather than declining in the process of modernization, traditional elements are on the rise in present day Chinese society (L. Sun, 1985). However, Sun's argument that modernity in China only exists as an insubstantial or vague semblance, because of the persistence of tradition as a deep underlying structure in Chinese culture is still open for discussion. The deep structure in Chinese culture and the persistence of tradition should be regarded as the root/origin of the Chinese alternative modernity.

With the combination of the traditional and the elements of modernity, the new Mao's cult shows more symbolization and contains more connotations, than the previous inflexible and zealous forms. It is also noteworthy that in the new cult in the post-Mao era, secularism and utilitarianism are more apparent than in the old one. In the new cult, Mao is more a symbol rather than a respected deceased leader.

## **Mao's Cult as Dao Tong**

It is reasonable to say that the above trend has been reversed since Deng Xiaoping came into power at the end of the 1970s, after which China opened another new epoch of modernization. The dilemma of how to evaluate the previous Chairman Mao loomed large within the CCP. However, it seemed that Deng Xiaoping already had an idea of how to deal with this thorny problem.

In 1980, Deng Xiaoping had an interview with the famous Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci. When Deng was asked whether Mao's portrait above Tiananmen Gate would be kept there, his answer was explicit: "Mao's portrait above Tiananmen Gate will be kept there forever". And he told Fallaci that "we shall not do to Mao what Khrushchev did to Stalin" (Z. Wu & Yu, 2007). However, Deng did not evade the problem of "Mao's mistakes" during the Cultural Revolution. He said:

In evaluating his merits and mistakes, we hold that his mistakes were only secondary. What he did for the Chinese people can never be erased. In our hearts we Chinese will always cherish him as a founder of our Party and our state (ibid).

A year later, the official evaluation of Mao was made by the Chinese Communist Party on June 27th, 1981. At the CCP's Sixth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee, they passed the "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China", in which it states:

Comrade Mao Zedong was a great Marxist and a great proletarian revolutionary, strategist and theorist. It is true that he made gross mistakes during the "cultural revolution", but, if we judge his activities as a whole, his contributions to the Chinese revolution far outweigh his mistakes. His merits are primary and his errors secondary. He rendered indelible meritorious service in founding and building up our Party and the Chinese People's Liberation Army, in winning victory for the cause of liberation of the Chinese people, in founding the People's Republic of China and in advancing our socialist cause. He made major contributions to the liberation of the oppressed nations of the world and to the progress of mankind.



This historical judgment for Mao is commonly known as his “mistakes amounted to only 30% and his achievements to 70%”. Since then, by emphasizing the importance of the market economy, Deng succeed in turning people’s attention towards the question of how to earn money. Obviously, the promotion of Mao was replaced by the promotion of the policy of reform and opening-up. Although official propaganda went quite, Mao and Maoism were not negated in general by the CCP. Obviously, the CCP could not wholly detach themselves from Mao and Mao’s thought, the significance of which is still a matter of importance in the political legitimacy of their rule. This is similar to the traditional Confucians maintenance of their “Dao Tong” (道统), the meaning is orthodoxy) to improve the legitimacy of their rule.

Dao-tong (道统), or Confucian orthodoxy, is an important Confucian concept, which means the orthodox system of Confucian values. In terms of its social-political meaning, the character of Dao Tong is manifested as a certain cultural-psychological identity, the orthodox ideology for organizing and regulating society. Thus, Dao Tong is beneficial for the cohesion of the nation. As Dao Tong is equal to orthodoxy, it possesses the power of self-evident authority and sanctity (J. Zheng, 2001). Thus Dao Tong has therefore also been the legitimacy for the rule of every ancient dynasty.

Even though it was the emperors who possessed the real political power and controlled the state machinery in traditional China, the legitimacy of the emperor’s rule would not have been recognized without the support from Dao Tong. Thus, in Chinese history, when an emperor ascended the throne, besides the sacralization provided by his own blood lineage, every emperor had to pledge himself to the orthodox in order to justify his rule (Zhao 2005, p. 17).

Mao was the founding father of the PRC, and the most vital figure laying the foundations for the prestige of the CCP among the Chinese people. Although widespread dismay over the chaos of the Cultural Revolution had resulted in a deep "crisis of faith" among the people after the “ten years catastrophe”, the prestige of Mao had remained supreme throughout China. If Mao and his thoughts had been totally negated officially, that would have meant that the rule of the CCP would have completely failed.

Keeping the shining image of Mao signifies the keeping of orthodoxy within the society in

China; keeping the orthodoxy in society signifies the control of the discourse of power, and thereby the maintenance of the legitimacy of CCP rule. And, until today, there are still many forbidden areas in discussion about Mao. According to a Chinese scholar Xiao Yanzhong, the bottom line of today's Chinese academic research on Mao can only reach "sub-official-ideology" (Xiao, 2005). In other words, compared with researchers before, Chinese scholars have been given freer rein, but they still need to pay attention to some taboos in their research.

Therefore, in the history of the Chinese Communist Party, you cannot find anything that compromises the lofty image of Mao, except for his only mistake - the Cultural Revolution. Deng Xiaoping and even subsequent party leaders still need to rely on Mao's prestige and achievement to maintain the ascendancy of the authority of the CCP.

### **Between Socialism and Capitalism**

After more than 20 years of development, there are many new features and varieties of Chinese modernization. Especially from the 1990s, some startling and unexpected transformations have occurred in the process of Chinese development towards its own version of modernity.

As we know, after the fierce struggle of the Tiananmen event in June of 1989<sup>45</sup>, the government of the CCP encountered unprecedented pressure from the western world. Several months later, a Romanian anti-communist riot and revolution broke out at the end of 1989 and Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu was shot by a firing squad on Christmas Day. Two years later, more shocking news came to the Chinese, which was that the Soviet Union had broken up after a few years of liberalization. Political upheavals in Eastern Europe raised serious doubts about the future of China, which had a shared ideology with the old USSR. Would China ever break up the way the Soviet Union did? And what would be next for the Chinese government, as well as the socialist society in China?

It is obvious that a succession of events raised fears of a collapse of the regime within the CCP, and this resulted in publicly expressed criticism of the economic reforms from the

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<sup>45</sup> In 1989, the Chinese government faced escalating student protests in Beijing and other cities. The regime cracked down hard, with tanks and soldiers from the People's Liberation Army. Estimates of the number of students, soldiers, and ordinary citizens are killed .

conservative faction of the CCP<sup>46</sup>. However, that did not deter the Chinese attempt at modern development. Deng Xiaoping's famous southern tour and a series of his speeches in 1992<sup>47</sup> reinvigorated the trend of further economic reform in China. He put forward some very encouraging notions at that time, which included, "to get rich is glorious" and "some areas must get rich before others". From then on, the Chinese reform and open policy headed further and further away from the system of socialism and an economy based on public ownership.

However, Deng did not intend to touch the heart of the Chinese's socialist political structure. To uphold the legitimacy of the CCP's continued rule, Deng stressed time and again that there was no fundamental contradiction between socialism and a market economy, and that the Chinese reform was still being carried on under the Four Cardinal Principles<sup>48</sup>. The most important was not to discuss whether the road of the Chinese reform was capitalist or socialist, but rather to endeavor to develop the productive forces more effectively.

Therefore, in order to promote Deng's socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics, Mao became the weight for a balance between capitalism and socialism, even between the economic reforms and the political legitimacy of the CCP's rule. After all, what Mao represents is the CCP's glorious past and Mao's Marxism with its Chinese characteristics, both of which laid the foundation of the Chinese Communist revolution.

From the end of 1990, the official propaganda of Mao returned. With respect to the above official evaluation, this is a significant turning point in the media propaganda of Mao Zedong's Thought.

The shift of the official attitude to Mao was also shown by the example of the course of "Mao Zedong Thought" in Chinese tertiary education curriculum. Around the early 1980s, there was not a separate course in Mao Zedong Thoughts in the series of Ideological and Political Theory courses. At that time, Mao's Thought was included in the course of "The history of

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<sup>46</sup> The most important representatives included Chenyun (陈云) and Li Xianlian (李先念). For more detailed information please refer to Zhao Suisheng's article titled *Deng Xiaoping's Southern Tour: Elite Politics in Post-Tiananmen China* (Zhao, 1993)

<sup>47</sup> In the spring of 1992, Deng Xiaoping visited several important cities in south of China, which included Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Shanghai. During his visit, he reasserted the importance of further economic reform in China.

<sup>48</sup> The principles are to keep to the socialist road and to uphold the people's democratic dictatorship, leadership by the Communist Party, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. It was put forward on the Third Plenary Session of our Party's Eleventh Central Committee, in September, 1978.

the CCP” or “Modern History of China”. A separate course named “Outline of Mao Zedong Thought” came into being in 1998. However, in 2005, it was incorporated into a course of “An Introduction to Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, and the Important Thought of Three Represents”. Although the Deng Xiaoping Theory is the predominant characteristic in the evolution of Chinese political and ideological courses in Chinese tertiary education, Mao Zedong Thought and its contribution to the Chinese revolution have been the indispensable ruling foundation of the CCP.

As long as Mao’s portrait is still hanging above Tiananmen Gate, no matter how economic reforms will be carried out, the direction of Chinese development will stick to socialism in the way that the CCP determines it.

### **Mao’s Cult as Nostalgia**

Geremie R. Barmé, an Australian scholar of Chinese history, wrote a book titled “*In the red: on contemporary Chinese culture*”, in which he argued that the nascent Mao cult since the late 1980s was a certain kind of nostalgia (Barmé, 1999, p. 320). For him, as an original physical condition, nostalgia has evolved to be “a social interior dialogue regarding the irrevocable past, an identification with what is perceived as having been lost” (Barmé, 1999, p. 317). Therefore, as a kind of nostalgia, the new Mao’s cult mirrors the present real world.

It is universally acknowledged that Chinese economic development has succeeded and modern markets have flourished as never before. Although economic reform still carries on under the government’s macroeconomic controls, some unexpected negative effects have occurred while the government has been keeping economic development as its central task.

As early as in the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping said in one of his interviews that China’s economic reform will do well even if it might suffer from some negative influences from capitalism, and that he wouldn’t think that this was so terrible. For him, capitalism was superior to feudalism. Unfortunately, things seemed to have gone beyond his expectations.

In order to adapt to this modern society, an influx of labourers from the countryside is flocking into big cities. At the same time, many workers from state-owned enterprises are laid-off and dumped onto the job market. These aggravate the pressures of getting

employment for graduates from universities and colleges.

In a brutal competitive system, many people realize that the society does not provide a fair opportunity for them. Some officials and businessmen are getting richer through corruption and collusion with power. According to a research database, the number of corrupt cases in the 1990s were much higher than those of the 1980s, because the expanding economy gave officials opportunities to abuse their power<sup>49</sup>. But for common people, there is nowhere for them to express their resentment.

The common people who live at the bottom of the social ladder find their lives more and more difficult. They find it increasingly difficult to afford the rising expenses of education, hospitals services and accommodation. An indisputable fact in this post-Mao Chinese modern society is that the gap between the rich and the poor has widened sharply. According to *The Social Blue Book of 2008* published by The Chinese Academy of Social Science, China's Gini coefficient soared from 0.249 in 1982, to 0.47 in 2008. This far surpassed the internationally acknowledged maximum warning line of 0.4.

It is no exaggeration to say that corruption was extremely rare in Mao's era. At that time, cadres, particularly senior ones, and communist party members, all played an exemplary role in correctly exercising the power in their hands. They were honest and upright and even took the initiative to crack down on all forms of corruption. While the official counter-corruption movement often degenerated into the elimination of dissidents among the government officers, people are disappointed with the current system and have a strong involuntary feeling of nostalgia for Mao's era.

What's more, the declining standard of social morals, bemoaned firstly by some intellectuals and the cultural elite, has become a common social phenomenon for the common people. This is exemplified in the recent food scandals.

In recent years, Chinese media have exposed a variety of food safety incidents, such as "toxic milk", "waste oil", "fake beef", "lean meat powder", "staining bread" and so on. It seems that

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<sup>49</sup> The research titled "Characteristics and Development Trend Research on Chinese Senior Officials' Corruption" was carried out by Chinese National Conditions Research Center of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) and Tsinghua University, and studied senior official corruption above vice-ministerial level over the past 20 years (1978-2002). (Source: <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2003/Jun/66715.htm>)

no one know where the Chinese ethical and moral bottom line may be. These lamentable events, which demonstrate a serious lack of integrity in some enterprises, have aroused mass worry and panic about the foods people are consuming. Although the problem of food safety has become a daily concern for the people, they can do nothing about it, and believe that the reports in the media are only the tip of the iceberg.

Furthermore, most people think that Chinese people are losing not only their ethical and moral standards, but also the national spirit the moral kingpin as advocated by Mao and which the nation relies on for survival and development.

All of these negative impacts seriously affect the development of Chinese modernization. Despite the government's promises to reverse this decay, the situation has not shown any improvment. When the nation lacks the transparency that democracy brings, it must lead to a lowering of the prestige of the CCP among the people.

Accordingly, some common people blame it all on Deng Xiaoping's economic reform and his thought, especially his viewpoint of letting some people get rich first. For them, the reforms and changes produce and intensify the injustice and inequality in society. They even consider that the emphasis of Mao and Mao's thought by the present government is more rhetoric than a real inheritance of Mao's spirit to "serve the people".

The people have begun to miss the simplicity and purity of Mao's era, its sense of national pride and self-worth, the officers' honesty and uprightness, and the spirit of whole-hearted service to the people. It is also reasonable to agree with Barmé's argument that:

As is so often the case when people face economic uncertainty and social anomies, old cultural symbols, cults, practices, and beliefs are spontaneously revived to provide a framework of cohesion and meaning for a threatening world. To many, Mao was representative of an age of certainty and confidence, of cultural and political unity, and, above all, of economic equality and incorruptibility (Barmé, 1999, p. 321).

For most civilians who are discontented with their present situation, there is nowhere for them to express their resentment. Therefore, in such an atmosphere of nostalgia, they are apt

to seek spiritual solace by holding a memorial ceremony and even worshiping Mao.

Overall, under the CCP's current ambivalent policy of being neither for nor against Mao's cult, various modes of it have revived as a response to the modernization in today's China. Interestingly, originating from the absolute anti-religion environment of Mao's era, Mao's cult today has evolved into a modern mode of Chinese popular religion.

Beside these obvious forms of religious worship, Mao's cult is conflated with patriotism, the legitimacy of the CCP, and Chinese national cohesion. These non-religious Mao's cults, whether originating from grass-roots initiation or government sponsorship, all manifest to Mao as a lasting, sacred and inviolable figure in the minds of Chinese people. The religious and non-religious Mao's cults during the post-Mao reform have created, together with the legendary economic developments an alternative modernity that is both different from the western model of modernity and the traditional Chinese culture.

### **Mao's cult as Alternative modernity**

As outlined above, the interpretation of Mao's cult and its implications are far beyond a political strategy for a power struggle between Mao and his opponents in the Party. It is reasonable to position Mao and his cult as an embodiment of the history of the PRC and the CCP, as well as central to Chinese modernity.

Modernity existed as one obsession for Mao's new China, and Mao never stopped his effort in pursuing modernization. However, as a consequence of the pervasiveness of traditional culture, Mao's cult originated from the absolute anti-religious environment during the early period of modern China. The Cultural Revolution created a Shen'' (God) in an atheist society, which endowed the early Mao's modernization with traditional religious features. It was the existence of Mao's cult that made Western scholars confused as to the nature of Mao's way of modern development. However, as we mentioned in the Chapter One, the persistence of tradition in modernity under the leadership of the CCP does not disqualify it as a kind of modernity. It is rather an alternative modernity that has grown out of the Chinese soil, incorporating both western influence and the Chinese tradition.

The revival of Mao's cult in today's China seems likely to reignite the doubt about the

Chinese modernity. Interestingly, Mao's cult has become a new tradition and evolved into a modern mode of Chinese popular religion, as well as forming the core of a new patriotism, the ideology underlining the legitimacy of the CCP, and the mainstay of Chinese national cohesion. The revival of Mao's cult in today's China, no matter whether in the religious form or non-religious form, illustrates how Mao has become a necessary part of the CCP and build socialism with Chinese characteristics, independently and innovatively.

China, as a non-Western country, has disengaged from the values of so-called normative modernity, which have evolved from the hegemonies of western ideology and cultures. The social phenomenon of Mao's cult can be viewed as the reincarnation of tradition in the modernization of China, which creates a unique Chinese model of modern development --- an alternative modernity in China.



# Conclusion

It is necessary to distinguish tradition from modernity; however, the interactions and interweaving between modernity and tradition are also of profound significance. The persistence of tradition in modernity is not a passive phenomenon; it is rather an active one. Preserved tradition is interwoven with certain characteristics of modernity and then becomes so-called 'created tradition'. Tradition, as an open system which includes and allows continuation and variation, leads to alternative modernities as a result of various transformations.

There is no general trend toward a homogenous modernity, because cultural developments are not homogenous. The persistence of tradition and multiple cultures in today's world manifests how the phenomenon of alternative modernity is one of the important traits in the development of the whole world. The western model might be not the best choice for non-Western societies. It is impossible for non-western countries to either abandon their traditional culture to develop a whole new modernity, or to develop a homogenous modernity in accordance with western standards.

In China, Mao Zedong was determined to construct a new modern China, and create a new world for the Chinese. It was inevitable that Mao's new China, as a modern national state, would become modern. Externally, Mao continued the iconoclastic spirit of the May Fourth New Cultural Movement and advocated modern democracy. On the other hand, because of the well-established traditions in the minds of Chinese people (including the figure of Mao himself), Chinese modernization was different from the western version.

Mao's cult is typical of the Chinese manifestation of an alternative modernization. No matter how Mao acted out his own cult role, under the traditional religious or the non-religious form, he did so in order to realize radically modern and non-traditional values. Nevertheless, it would be falling into a "standard" western theoretical and conceptual framework to discuss "whether Mao's cult is a religion". It is better to focus on particular patterns of Chinese development and modernization. Even after Mao's death, the phenomenon of Mao's cult still exists in today's China, no matter whether it is in a folk religious form or as a symbol of the

CCP's orthodox values.

Without Mao's traditional monarchical consciousness, without other traditional and loyal revolutionaries around Mao, and without a social environment which promoted the traditional worship of authority and power, the rise and growth of Mao's cult would have been inconceivable. Whereas, without the national spirit and cohesion demonstrated by Mao's cult, Chinese modernization would have also been inconceivable. Furthermore, Mao and Mao's thought, as a new tradition for China today, brought about a new form of Mao's cult. That is to say, to a certain extent, the tradition itself was created in the context of modernity. Furthermore, modernity would be inconceivable without the "created" tradition.

It is reasonable to argue that the existence of Mao's cult is the consequence of the persistence of Chinese traditional culture in the modern context. To be more precise, Mao's cult is an "other" or "alternative" modernity, rather than a pure modern social phenomenon, or simply a persistence of traditional culture. The complexity of the cult of Mao demonstrates that it should be understood in different ways regarding modernity and modernization, and that there are multiple models of development in accordance with the cultural diversity of the human world.

Therefore, through the exploration of the phenomenon of Mao's cult in China, it has been useful to identify the particular trait of China's modernity and to summarize the basic findings: there is no point arguing the superiority of the western model of development by comparing western modernity with non-western modernity.

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